





Sinister Wisdom 40 Spring 1990

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SINISTER WISDOM, founded 1976

Former editors and publishers: Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)
and Catherine Nicholson (1976-81)
Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-83)
Michaele Uccella (1983-84)
Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-87)

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

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unconditional love. That your friends are there for you in an emergency and when it's time to party. That a friend is a lesbian with whom you can be as honest as you are with yourself.

Our friendships inspire us, give us the room to bask in the pleasure of being, touch our wonder at the infinite variety of personal expression, prod us into imagining a world that's safe for the womyn we care about, goad us into change.

But they're hard to talk about. We know what they are when we have them, but everyone thinks of them a little differently; talking about them makes us feel vulnerable, perhaps a little dippy. Like talking about happiness or the beauty of the world, we have little practice in describing, in our own words, the things we love about each other. And there may be an ingrained fear, like the fear of the "evil eye" — if we show we care too much, it will seem as if we're boasting, and somehow our friendships will be taken away.

Friendship mundane: the morning gossips, the womyn who share the little details of their days, the accumulation of habits — too ordinary for dramatic writing.

Friendship sweet: a quality bordering on the precious, too cloying, too self-congratulatory to bear analysis.

Friendship intimate: where the secrets find voice, where you open up your contradictions and longings, where you're silly and playful — the private self that exists *only* for your friends.

How will we share what we learn in those places?

Friendship: The Book Review

One of the things that helped me gather my thoughts about this issue was Jan Raymond's book, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection** (Beacon, 1986). I regret that we don't have a couple of reviews on it in this issue, since it deserves to be widely used to start discussions and arguments.

* While there was much I found valuable in *A Passion for Friends*, I also found serious flaws: the way Raymond keeps switching who she's talking to (The New York Times, her tenure review committee, straight women or lesbians?), and the occasional tangent where she surreptitiously tries to have the last word in old arguments were among the most annoying; the assertion towards the end that your lover should be your best friend was the most puzzling.

Raymond suggests that friendship starts with befriending the self in order to move from a pre-programmed woman's waiting state of being into a self-realizing adventuresome frame. Friendship between womyn involves thoughtfulness, passion, insight, vision, discernment, habit through time, worldliness and happiness. And friendship is the place in which we can locate ourselves in the world. That is, it is through friendships that we get a toehold, a reference/starting point in material reality, and from which we can act.

Raymond also writes about the obstacles to female friendship, the ways we disappoint each other and the ways we can recover from that: "The safest victims of our disappointment and rage are those of our own sex. It is simple to negate the values of feminism and of female friendship that were formerly held. It is much more difficult to confront the disillusionment and make up one's mind and heart to once more choose for women." (p. 199)

A Passion for Friends is ultimately optimistic: "Gyn/affection has the power to help tie women's lives together, to make connections that have not been made, and to provide a unifying and directing influence in all other areas of female existence in this world. Female friendship creates a network of meaning that transcends women's past, our ordinary lives, and our present." (p. 213)

An adventuresome frame

I have been jealous of men's chronicles of mobility and options for as long as I can remember: from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to *Moby Dick* to *On the Road*, men made friends and adventured. In their adventures, the world was made.* Cities and highways were built, trade routes plied, wars of course, wars, dying nobly beside each other, tremendous risks, character flaws and self-centeredness elevated to universal tragedy, the full staring down of death, the great griefs, and all the while a friend around to help in a jam, to reminisce with around the fire at night.

At home the womyn are left to each other. We are supposed to infer that if men's friendships make the world, women's friendships make the home, and women should know their place.

* Susanjill says, "and what a sloppy job they did!"

Women's *civilizing* aspect (that which provides justification for everything that men do as well as the space to bring up the next generation of workers) is what women get as consolation for the fact that we aren't supposed to hitchhike, or ride our pickup trucks out into the mountain wilderness with our women friends, build ships together and set sail, or start political parties, spending our nights playing cards and strategizing.

If we stop waiting for someone else to come and make our lives interesting, we can be-friend ourselves, as Jan Raymond writes, and start to adventure. Once you can adventure, you can share the adventure and be flexible enough to join other womyn's adventures as a pal. From river rafting to overthrowing the patriarchy, there's lots of adventures left, ain't there, friends?

Friends, lovers and community

My friend Susanjill goes over my notes for this with red ink, as she usually does. I want to write about the differences between being friends and being lovers; I keep wanting to say something like lovers comfort us, friends challenge us; and I get lost trying to untangle lover from friend. I long for a clear distinction: friends are x , lovers, q . And clear equations: the value of friends is x^{10} while the value of lovers is $q^5 + x^3$.

Susanjill inks in: why bother making this distinction? Friendship is valuable in its own right, free from competitiveness of definition; friendship without comparison to other types of relationships can stand on its own merit.

But among us lesbians, definition of relationship is a major problem. We often feel we live in a fishbowl where everything we do is the subject of comment and speculation. It may be we scrutinize each other so because we have very few ways to really understand, or perceive our own patterns of behavior. Scientists study dolphin communities at sea for years,* for instance, making careful notes on types and duration of physical proximity in order to determine social structure. Our social structures are created by our friendship and lover networks, and they are extremely mutable.

* A job I've always coveted, despite my tendency towards terminal sea-sickness.

We often make friends with our lovers and ex-lovers, with our lovers' ex-lovers and friends, and their lovers. We tend to make friends with those who are familiar to us, whose ideas are familiar, whose work moves us, whose energy compels us. From time to time we make friends who are very different from us and yet our friendship makes us *compañeras*, challenges our world views, excites and teaches us; and sometimes our friendships offer sustaining and creative energy and we become *carnal*s, as Gloria says, we share the substance of life between us.

Recently there was a Lesbian Dynamics of Color conference in San Francisco.* The process of making the conference made many lesbians friends, and the process of attending the conference together gave many a sense of possibility in their communities, if only the possibility for continuing arguments. This is a form of friendship: that we show up for each other, that we take each other's different struggles seriously, that we get ourselves educated and we work wherever we can to increase every woman's mobility in the world: our actual ability to do what we want, when we want to, with whom. To extend that desire is an act of friendship, is the politics of friendship, is the open-hearted wish we hope to engender with our dreaming, envisioning, utopian, hard-headed, hard-working, demanding selves.

Yet political community and friendship are not the same. It is possible to live and act in community without intimate relationships. But I believe it's impossible to have intentional communities without friendship clusters — intimate connections where we tell our histories, get feedback, learn how our actions affect others.

Maybe my desire for clear definition is wrong-headed. Unfluid. We are all water and breath, after all, we have currents and tidal motion, we flow in and out of each other; it may not be important to keep a clear boundary between lover and friend and colleague. It may, in fact, be something that comes to us through the dictates of heterosexual ownership needs, it may all be connected to property and inheritance.

* Honoring Diversity —The Dynamics of Color Lesbian Conference on Racism, building a stronger lesbian community, Nov. 1989.

On a very real level, we *are* our friends — we become something more and other than our individual selves by the transformative power of the energy we give off and absorb. This is the great adventure of our lives: to love ourselves enough to be open to where our friendships take us. To experiences ourselves with other womyn as active and creative beings whose hearts are moved by the world, whose world is changed by our hearts.



Queer among Queers

Just before you get this issue, *Out/Look* magazine will have held its conference for lesbian and gay writers (Out Write '90) in San Francisco. Well into the organizing, we were invited to participate, but declined when we found out there would be no womyn-only workshops to address lesbian and women's concerns. No mention was made in advance advertising that there would be no womyn-only space available.

The requirement that all workshops be co-facilitated by lesbians and gay men is clearly absurd when gay men want to have a sex-writing workshop or dykes want to discuss the literature of childhood sexual abuse. But more than absurd, it is a form of compulsory heterosexuality.

Once again those of us who choose to live our lives as much as we can among womyn are shut out. A slick advertising campaign proclaiming Out Write the first national lesbian and gay writers conference (ignoring the national lesbian writers' conferences that Marie Kuda organized in Chicago in the '70s) insures that those writers who get excluded "don't count." This is coalition politics at its worst: coalition that refuses to honor the autonomy of the movements that make it possible. We are forced to either include men in our most intimate discussions of our work and communities or be silenced.

Notes on the Themes

The next issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, the Italian-American Issue, is being guest-edited by Janet Capone and Denise Leto, who have done a tremendous amount of work and consciousness-raising in the last year. We hope you look forward to #41 as much as we do.

In the meantime, the irregular gang who usually brings you *SW* will start work on issue #42, an open issue (deadline June 15th). We also hope to clear up unfinished business and submission correspondence while Janet and Denise work on #41 — this is a good time to nudge us if we owe you a letter.

In 1991 (our 15th anniversary) we are planning a double issue (either #43/44 or 44/45) collection of the editors' choice from the first fifteen years, so we will be reading manuscripts for only one other issue in 1991 (theme to be announced). Send us your best work, and remember to follow the guidelines on the back cover.

Apologies & Corrections

In "Resources of Interest to Lesbians with Disabilities" in the last issue (#39), we incorrectly listed the wonderful publication *Hikané: The Capable Womyn*, misspelling its name, and printing the wrong institutional subscription rate. The institutional sub rate is \$24 (\$14 individual, sliding scale available, free to womyn in prison). *Hikané* is also available on tape. We encourage all dykes to read/listen and subscribe to this important disabled wimmin's newsletter for lesbians and our wimmin friends. PO Box C9, Hillsdale, NY 12529.

In the same resource list, we incorrectly wrote that the Disabled Artists' Network sponsors thematic shows. DAN does *not* mount shows, but *is* a unique support network / information exchange / bulletin board for self-identified disabled artists, whose members are primarily women. *Please* be sure to include SASE when you write: PO Box 20781, NYC, NY 10025.

Mary Carol Randall

Commitment

I

When I was six
my best friend
believed in witches, magic
we meditated, and cast spells
between us
we shared a locket, lone pine tree
by a dusk blue lake, a violet sky
set in silver
it was our pledge.
We passed it
back and forth
once every six months
neither
could own it alone.

II

This year July
was the month for
lesbian weddings, long tables
of flowers and fruits
and other good foods
laid out beneath redwoods.
We invoked the four directions:
Mother earth to ground us, water to move us,
air for lightness of speech, fire
to honor the passion
of the couple before us, we drank
apple and grape
to their union, we witnessed
their pledges
we danced
and made music

honoring them
and ourselves
and our need
not to hide
any longer.

III

This is another
story I like
the 15-year celebration
of two friends, special dinner, recognition
two women
together.

And this: two lovers,
eight years in love, but living
separately, one
alone, one
with friends, and the five-year anniversary
of that household.

IV

When I was 18
I knew a woman
with a four-year-old
disabled
daughter. I cared for
the child while her mother
worked. When I moved
out of state, no one else
could be found
to do that: "put the child
away," they said, "put her
away
from you
go on, just
go on
with your
life."

And where were the women
to honor her pledge
to her daughter, to stand
in the place
they'd determined
only a lover could fill?

V

When I sat with my mother dying
my best friend
sat there with us
held my hand
and we
were not lovers.

And on Mother's birthday
the year before
when we laughed
and wore silly hats
my friend brought the cake
from a favorite bakery
forty miles away
and we were not lovers.

Women together, what are the ways
of our loving?
Bright and many
as stars in the heart of a lake.

VI

What of women
who struggle politically
in the same groups
year after year?
Who argue, go away,
come back,
try again, risk arrest,
build a clinic, a bookstore, a demonstration, a movement, a press
who change

the shape of the world
with their vision
and their work. Do they
pause
for celebration, or only buy gifts
for the couples, saying "here
is the real
commitment, growth, sense
of solidness." Do they? Do we?

VII

Who do we honor? Who cares
for us, with whom
do we build our dreams
and our days?

VIII

July
was the month
for lesbian weddings
and I was glad
to attend.
The tables
were lovely
bright with flowers
and I loved my friends
and wished them well
for years to come

But then I asked
where is the ritual
the calling of the goddess, the buying and wrapping
of gifts in bright paper
the feasts
for these others
these women: mothers, sisters, daughters, friends,
aunts, nieces, comrades, friends again
who love us
who laugh with us, who bring us gifts

who teach and comfort
and challenge
who have promised
by their actions
to be there
in sickness and in health
in trouble and in joy?

Women together, what are the ways
of our loving?
Bright and many
as stars
in the heart of a lake.



Susan, Marjorie and Sarra, 1989
Beth Karbe

In a Penal Colony

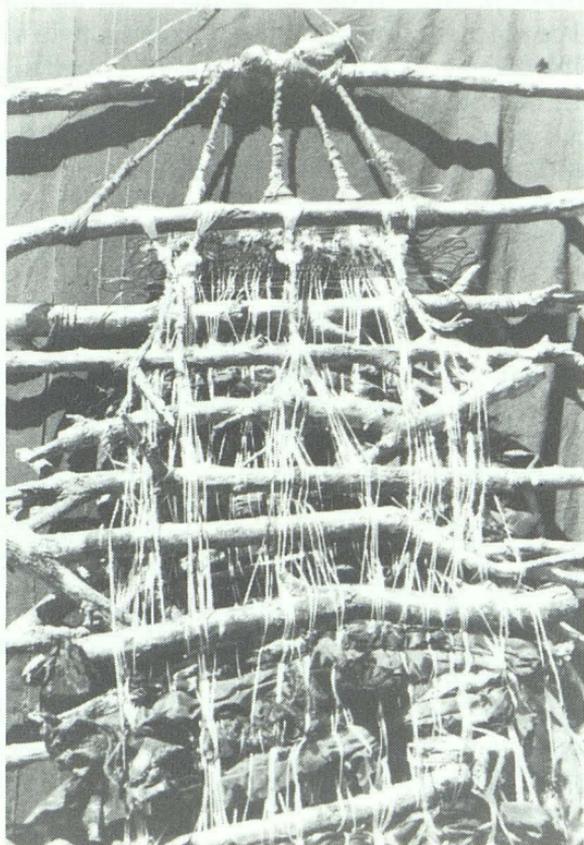
Friends, everybody needs them, so why is it that so few of us, lesbian women in prison, have any?

To be friends in an American Penal Colony is to break one of the major cardinal rules governing institutional life: "Thou shalt not exhibit compassion, commiseration, or heartfelt understanding to a fellow inmate." This unwritten law of the land is reinforced by the constant reminders to "Do your own time," "Don't get involved with another's problems," "All physical contact between prisoners is for purposes of sexual gratification; therefore, no physical contact is allowed," "To witness a rule violation and not report it makes you guilty of aiding and abetting said violation and punishable to the same degree as the violator — be a snitch or risk going to jail in jail, you are your sister's keeper," "Never trust another inmate's word." All these rules, reminders of rules, serve only to isolate and divide the prison population. They breed distrust, suspicion and alienation. They de-socialize by outlawing sharing, giving or exchanging any of your personal or state-issued property. They dehumanize by stultifying any outward display of kinship or friendship. They atrophy the spirit of friendship, killing the humanity which constitutes one's soul.

To have a friend, one must be a friend and to be a friend in an American Penal Colony, one must be courageous and strong. One must be generous of spirit and love and twice as generous in committing everyday revolutionary acts: to offer comfort in times of bereavement, a sympathetic ear when things go illogically wrong, a bar of "free world soap" or an envelope given to one in need with no thought to it being returned, or being a sounding board keeping meddlesome good intentions to yourself, to assist another in writing a grievance when a guard infringes on someone's "residual constitutional rights," to cry with someone in pain or rejoice at another's joy. These are all everyday revolutionary acts in Penal Colony, U.S.A. and I am a dedicated, committed revolutionary.

I am one of the fortunate few who has someone I know to be my friend. Our friendship is one of sharing, not mainly material things (even though on occasion we do) but we share a smile, a

good book, points of view and philosophies, laughter, tears, jokes, magazines, TV programs, knowledge, dreams, goals, hopes and heartaches. Our friendship is for us a form of freedom, freedom to be ourselves, to express our innermost thoughts without fear of being judged or condemned, freedom to disagree and know that our relationship is secure, the freedom to grow into all we aspire to be as human beings basking in the sunshine of a friend's smile. Our friendship has given Mary Francis and me the ability to survive and retain our humanity in an American Penal Colony.



this title keeps changing
birdelle (b.a. byrd)

Sinister Wisdom Friendship Discussion 12/5/89

*Present: Elana, Susan, Val, Jasmine,
Caryatis, Cath, Susanjill (SJ), Naja (by phone)**

Elana: Let me look it up, the guidelines for this issue: "On Friendship. 'Just' friends? 'Best' friends? 'Old' friends? 'Life-long' friends? How do we befriend each other? What do we expect from our friendships? What do we put into them? How do we understand the complex differences (and similarities) between friend and lover? What about betrayals? Is friendship part of political movement? Are political movements possible without friendship? What's the difference between a 'clique' and a 'network?' What kind of friendships do we make across race, class, cultural, ability, size, age differences? How do we sustain and nurture our friendships through time?"

Jasmine: I was thinking about friendship, I think about it a lot. I talk about it a lot, I work about it a lot, in my own self, and I have a lot of acquaintances that like me. But I don't really feel like I have any friends.

Elana: What's the definition you're using for the difference between an acquaintance and a friend?

Jasmine: An acquaintance is somebody that I know — and I may actually get to know her fairly well over a period of time — and a friend is someone who has a desire to spend time with me doing things and hanging out. It doesn't mean that I haven't called on a number of people in this room for help. But still I consider everyone here to be my acquaintance, rather than my friend.

It begins to occur to me that there's not a known way of being friends that I can look at and see clearly, what I have observed in people who are friends with one another often seems to me to be pretty much like how straight people are friends with one another. There's a sort of parameter of rules that have come to us from a system that we as lesbians don't really want to support.

* This is a condensed and edited conversation. About twenty minutes into it, Susanjill had to take a phone call that lasted about twenty minutes. Val had to leave early, and Naja joined us by speaker-phone about two-thirds of the way through. We were sitting together in a large living room on a sunny California Sunday afternoon. For more information about who we are, check out the Sinister Wisdom photos on pp. 124-127.

Elana: Like we often end up being in couple relationships that mirror what our parents did or what they do on TV — we have a parallel struggle in developing our friendships?

Jasmine: Yes. We have a parallel struggle in developing our friendships.

Cath: Well, something you said leads me to believe that your definition of friendship and mine are not the same. I think my definition of a friend is if I know, without question, they would do whatever I asked, if they could.

Elana: Well, that's an issue of trust. And your desire for that relationship. 'Cause you could believe that somebody else would, for whatever reason, do whatever you asked them, and still not want them to do it.

Caryatis: It would have to be someone that I would *want* to trust like that, and who I would be willing to do for, also. So, it has to be mutual, because you do meet people sometimes who would be happy to devote themselves to you.

Cath: It's entirely having to do with trust, entirely. Because what you're trusting is that you both know and understand each other's boundaries.

Susanjill: You were saying, Jasmine, what are the messages and the rules about friendship and where do we get them?

Jasmine: Right.

Susan: And that they're no different from the culture that we grew up in. You're saying that they are or are you asking *if* they are?

Jasmine: I think that they're not.

Elana: But what are the images of friendship from the culture? Really there are two distinct kinds of friendships. One is men's friendships and one is women's friendships. And men's friendships, which are the source of most...

Susanjill: ...movies.

Elana: Movies. Magazine articles.

Susanjill: Billboards.

Elana: ...there are very few women's books that I can think of about women's friendships. Very few lesbian books about that. Men have these books where they go off and they adventure together. They do something, they raze/raise a city, they discover the golden fleece, they climb a wall, or they fish.

Susan: That's why *Steel Magnolias* was such an attractive movie in its way because it's about four women and their friendship.

Elana: Right, but those women don't *do* anything. I mean that's the thing about women's friendships is they don't adventure together, they don't...

Jasmine: But they build communities.

Cath: And that's adventure.

Jasmine: On the radio the other day, somebody did a long thing about why women live longer than men. And their conclusion was that women form community, and that men don't, and that therefore, what keeps women living is community, is the fact that they can form communities.

I want you to know when I'm talking about just this word love in this conversation, what I'm saying today, I mean not sex. I mean, loving feeling toward another person. That's how I mean that word. It's mostly about how to set boundaries, about how to keep people in their place, make sure people know how little or how much you think of them, about how to protect yourself, about how to protect yourself, about how to protect yourself. A thousand times. Every minute. And I think that those are the things that our relationships are predicated on, about clashing with one another, about how to clash in a most interesting way.

Susanjill: The heterosexual context I grew up with was friends are what you have when (a) you don't have a boyfriend or (b) you've been abandoned by the men. It's like the women fall to each other when they have no one else to be with. Women are the net we catch each other in when we fall, and we don't fall because of ills done to each other by each other, but because of the men.

Caryatis: Well, except for it leaving us with no good short stories for Sinister Wisdom, I don't worry about this business of lack of adventure. You know, that women don't *do* anything together, and men do these active things, because these men aren't friends. They're buddies, you know, they're pals, they're two guys who do something together. Or two thousand guys who do something together, it doesn't matter.

Cath: Men don't know how to be intimate with one another.

Caryatis: They have no idea how to have *anything*, it's not even a matter of community, there's nothing between them. Women do, and that is what life is about, not rafting in the Yukon, and not getting the golden fleece. I watch some lesbians today doing this, building all their friendships around common activities. So they

go skiing with this one, and go and do this activity with this one, and they have all these friends, and they have a really full calendar, and when they need something, there's nobody home. There's nothing there. They don't know each other. You are never whole in yourself with any of them because each one is just somebody with whom you perform certain activities. I watch some of these folks with 20 and 30 friends, while I can only find the energy for 2 or 3 — that is a full schedule, with everything it takes to really have a friend.

Cath: I can think of 3 people that I truly call friends, who I know well enough to call them friends. And three people is probably the most I've ever had as friends at any one time. That's not to mean that I don't value other people in my life, but that that level of understanding between us is there to that extent.

Susan: Talking about the difference between straight women who are friends together and lesbians who are friends together, the way Susanjill was talking, that for straight women, a woman friend is someone who will support you in your daily struggle to live with people who tear you down. You know, that sort of place you can go. The difference for lesbians is not being engaged in that struggle all the time, that's a real difference that I feel in the level that lesbian friendships can develop. I'm experiencing an intensified focus on the nature of my friendships now because I just left Northampton where I lived as a lesbian for 8 years, and I'm realizing how there were dykes who I relied on although we only saw each other on the street or at events, so I wasn't conscious of how much they meant to me. And then there were a couple who were my intimates, and there were hours on the phone telling each other everything and we knew everything that was going on with each other all the time. And that is something I miss, *really* miss now, and it takes a long time, in my experience, to build that trust with someone.

Cath: You can't say, one morning, I want you as my friend, and suddenly you are. It doesn't happen that way.

Val: I think it's interesting to hear you say, three, 'cause I have one, one friend, that I consider really, that friend-friend, that kind of person where there's just all that intimacy and stuff. And I always imagined that other lesbians have like 6 of those, or like 20 of those, and I just have one.

Cath: And it's not to say that with those 3 people that I'm completely intimate with each of them. I'm not. There are pieces

of me that each of them don't get to see. But among the three of them, I guess, most of me is there. So, there are boundaries, even with good friends.

Elana: All this about intimacy and trust may be why we got so many pieces about lovers. Because women who are straight won't necessarily think of women they feel love for as potential sexual partners, while I think that lesbians, as soon as you feel an emotion that is something like love, the first thing we think about — well, not the first, but somewhere in there — "I really feel warmth and trust and intimacy and closeness for this woman, then maybe I should kiss her. And if I like to kiss her, then..."

Cath: I'm very clear when the three people who I call my friends, I guess maybe I should call them my intimates, that those people are not lovers and they're not going to be lovers, ever. And I would be quite distraught if such a thing were to occur.

Elana: It's one of the things that keeps us going forwards and backwards and around in circles, this stuff about the boundaries of intimacy. I was just thinking about how Jan Raymond was writing about, in her book about friends, about the Chinese marriage resisters in the last century. They were friends to each other in a political context, they formed cooperatives, had houses, and they controlled their economic reality together, and they did that until the state came and crushed it. That's my fantasy of lesbian life, that we will have this friendship network that we've been building for the last thirty years, thirty generations, and we'll be able to somehow get beyond ourselves, our personal stuff, our need to have that one-to-one stuff all the time, and be able to use our friendships to create an economic base, to actually change the reality of large groups of women. And I see that as a function of friendship, but it never gets there. It goes back to, she became lovers with so-and-so, and if my best friend became lovers with X, I can't talk to her any more and we don't do it.

Cath: And that behavior is what I think of as coming from the straight world. That stuff about, if she's lovers with her, then I can't be friends with her. You know, that's bullshit. In some ways, I think we're treating our lovers as if they were men, in the straight world, as if we were straight and they were men.

Susan: So that we and our lover don't need friends, we don't need the friends unless it breaks.

Cath: It's like we're still characterizing our entire lives as being in relationship to our lovers. And the only times we have friends are

when we don't have lovers, and when we have lovers we don't have friends. And the things that will break our friendships up *are* our lover relationships. And I think that's bullshit.

Val: I think that just the fact that we sleep together in itself complicates it. Just the fact that we're going to have relationships between, like me and my ex, that the two of us are in this community, just that in itself, seems to stand in the way of us having these wonderful economic realities together.

Cath: But recognizing that that situation is temporary may solve some of that. Sure, you may not want to see this person for a while, but are you going to not want to see this person forever?

Caryatis: I've got an ex I don't want to see again ever. There are a lot of violent lesbians and a lot of dangerous ex-lovers and knowing that someone is relating to her does give me a different opinion of that somebody. It does.

Val: We're getting onto that lover stuff again. I don't think it's necessarily that heterosexual models get imposed on our friendships, it's that we have such deep stuff with each other. You know, it's different from what happens in the straight world, and just because I slept with my ex for nine years, that's just this whole other thing that affects friendship...

Susan: That you don't want to see her for a while may not come from heterosexual stuff but the way in which friends of a couple will take sides really does come from heterosexuality. Not that two women who are breaking up should have to be around each other, but everybody else around them doesn't have to engage in the pain of their breakup. When I was a lawyer, I did a lot of divorces for straight people, and the way in which everyone around them would become like two armed camps was an amazing thing to watch. And to see it being done with lesbians is discouraging.

Jasmine: I just think that sometimes we say things to one another that have hurt people. But *why* do we relate to each other with these hurtful things? Why? Isn't it because we learned to hurt one another in the way that we grew up? It's like this line between what people are kvetching about co-ing, I don't want to take care of you, I don't want to take care of you, but also, what's the difference between co-ing and looking at what somebody else's needs are for a minute and letting them have their needs. And isn't that a way of being in a friendship, when you look past your own needs and see what someone else's needs are and let them have them.

Caryatis: How do you *let* someone have their needs? It assumes they're yours to give.

Jasmine: Well, what if you know a person's needs are to have a specific amount of feedback, or to be listened to, or have a birthday party, or to do something. And you do that for that person. Not do it all, but you facilitate some part of them in movement in the world in that way. Isn't that what friendship is?

Caryatis: That's not how I would define friendship.

Jasmine: What then?

Caryatis: I don't know how I would define it, I only know that's one of the ways I wouldn't. I don't think we're here to fill each other's needs. It's placing the definition of friendship outside of the two women, again. It's saying that friendship is doing for each other.

Cath: Well, it is.

Caryatis: I don't think it is.

Elana: Well, what *do* you think it is?

Caryatis: Being with each other. It can't be so focused for me on outside things, what you do or don't do for one another. Because we all have so many different limitations, and if it's a matter of giving parties and fetching and carrying, what happens to poor and disabled people, who can't *do* all those things for someone? They have no friendships? My friends' value to me is in who they are. I can just sit in a room with them, sit in a park with them, I can know they're somewhere in the world, they don't have to do for me. We're putting things too far outside of ourselves.

Cath: I didn't mean to give that impression. When you said you think that the doing for one another has to be mutual, of course it does. And that also takes into account the person's ability.

Jasmine: Do you have to give up the idea that in a friend, somebody is going to know that you value feedback or you value such-and-such? Let's say feedback about how you write. You don't give it to that person, does it have to mean, not a friend? If one of the parameters that you started the friendship with was that there was writing, that you were both writers and you were going to give each other feedback about writing, and then she doesn't. Then what?

Susan: Well, you're talking about a broken contract. I mean, like a broken promise that she was going to do this thing with you. The shared activity is one thing, the feelings...

Caryatis: If the friend doesn't share this feedback, what I hear you saying is that that means she doesn't love you any more, or isn't showing her love. And what I hear you saying is *you* don't love her any more, because she's not doing that thing for you. And I can't accept that kind of a basis for love or friendship. Some of my greatest joy in my friends is just watching them be in the world, watching them with each other.

Cath: In the last two years, I have lost two friends, women that I considered family. One because she changed, and the other because I changed. And it wasn't what we would or wouldn't do for each other, or the consideration that we showed one another, but what we meant to each other changed. Our limitations, our boundaries changed. With one, I can no longer tolerate her inconsideration.

My other friend went straight. Her needing to be with men was not what bothered me, but the way that she perceived it bothered me. She defined intimacy as necessarily requiring men. In other words, our relationship, in her definition, became incidental, was peripheral. So, it was our definitions of what we were to each other that changed.

Elana: But if, for example, your friend did drugs, you would be unhappy for her, but you would accept that she did drugs and hope that someday she would stop doing drugs, but you would still be her friend.

Caryatis: To a point.

Susan: But it would be a point at which she disappeared.

Elana: We started out this conversation saying a friend was somebody who would never say no to you. But I think, in fact, when you're a friend to somebody, they're who you *can* say no to. They're who you learn how to define values with, how to say, this is what I need, or no you cannot call me up at 3 o'clock in the morning. Being engaged actively in that process over time is what makes friendship. And it can come to a point where the people say, no, this isn't working, and then it stops. Or it changes — it's not like you ever lose that sensation you had for ten years with your friend, it's still inside of you, it's part of how you look at the world, it's how you form your new friendships. But it stops with her, unless she ever finds a way to repair it. Which I assume is open ... if you have a friend that you really love and something goes wrong, there's a place that it can be fixed.

Cath: It's true. If my friend who went straight were to come back

to me tomorrow and say, I was a jerk, you're absolutely right, men are assholes, and I realize now that the loss of our friendship means more to me than any person I could marry, that would be like nothing had happened to us. I'm not, like, holding my breath. But, that, I think, is repairable. On the other hand, the relationship I cut off with my other friend is not repairable. Because it would take a lot more than just saying, I was wrong. My standards have changed. And I would have to see over a period of time whether or not her standards had also changed. So sometimes friendships are not repairable. But she had twelve years to do that.

Susanjill: Well, I think part of the problem for creating friendships is you need an arena to do it in. I have contacts in my lesbian life that come much more readily to me than to straight women I know. Partly because we all created something, even if we don't agree about what it is, about how we have access to each other.

Elana: Well, this is the thing that I was just wanting to talk about, that other kind of friendship that you have in a political organization. Like, at the end of the anti-racism conference last month, everybody made this circle. All the women of color made circles, and then all the women who were not women of color made a circle around them, and then the people who had had them do that said, "Now, look at all these faces, these are all the people who are going to be watching your back." There was a sense of warmth and comradeship. It was the women's movement that I wanted 20 years ago. It felt a little late, but...[laughter] ... I mean, these things build through our lifetimes, they're building much more slowly than I ever hoped. But that sense of how we make friends in a social context, where we build organizations that actually change our lives, or change how we see each other, or have access to information about women who aren't like ourselves — how do you get from the one-to-one to that which builds community? This is a place where I feel all stirred up and muddled. What's the meaning of this kind of friendship? You know, what's the focus of it?

Susanjill: Part of the problem is we confuse romanticism with other things. I mean, that circle thing that we did at the conference, it was sort of a romantic gesture, it was very sweet, and it was very moving, and it came out of a moment that we truly shared, but it was more magic than real, given the context that we have the rest of our life in. And that's too bad. And it's repairable.

Cath: But every time you do magic, it changes the universe.

Susan: We're talking about political friends, those people who think enough like us so we realize we have enough in common so we can work together.

Elana: Isn't that really what friendship is? I mean, at a community level, isn't that what friendship is?

Val: To sing together?

Elana: To be able to. Right, at a community level, to have a feeling of real affection and love for other women, and to want to change our lives. Because, really, the circumstances of women's lives are horrible and isolated and it's the same for us as lesbians. It's not like, we changed and our old age is secure and we're living in secure housing. It's not fixed — we're still all one-to-one against the world. To have that feeling that we want to change it is an act of communal friendship, and I feel sometimes like our one-to-one friendships are what we settle for. Because we can't get out of our lives in a way that makes us able to have a community-wide friendship. Not like we don't need those friendships to nurture our lives, but I feel like we really need something more.

Jasmine: Maybe it's because I feel like none of those friendships that I've ever developed over the years have been friendships or have lasted, that I felt the community can't be based on friendship. And that the community has to be based, rather, on space.

Susan: On what?

Jasmine: On space, on architecture, on form, both physical and logical form. And friendships will fall into place after the community is there, but you can't base community on friendships. If something hasn't worked up until today, change the something.

Cath: You're talking about creating a community of friendships instead of, or in addition to, the close friends. I think we have it, I think it's there.

Val: I think we don't value or know how to talk about and *value* and that other difficult stuff. Like us, like the Sinister Wisdom group, the other way that you can be friends.

Cath: I *do* value that. I think of it as an expanding set of concentric circles.

Val: But we think of it with the important ones in the middle, right? Maybe it doesn't have to be that model, where we have our intimate friends in descending order of importance to our core.

Cath: Sure. And I don't think that's wrong. I don't see why you'd *want* it to not be like that.

Elana: It's the feeling that we settle for intimacy, which sounds strange. Intimacy is a wonderful thing and this tremendous gift and blessing, certainly in my life, but I feel like it's a way that we insulate ourselves from our disappointment and our ineffectiveness as women. We fill ourselves up with our intimacy because it's the place where we *do* feel effective, or the place where we can feel ourselves being felt. It's very hard for us to imagine owning ten blocks of Oakland and having an expanding lesbian housing base with community gardens and cottage industries or whatever. Every time we try to make that effective leap, something stops us. Ourselves, our conditioning, the banks saying no, we're not going to give you a loan, whatever it is, it gets stopped.

We use our friendship, or that thing around friendship, and that's where friendship and lovership get joined, as a way of absorbing our attention and being the arena of our effectiveness. Did that make any sense?

Susan: It's like, in order to succeed at that, we'd have to reverse the Industrial Revolution [laughter] ... We don't have a shared, well, destiny is all I can think of. And it just disempowers us in that way. Changing that would mean changing that whole way of seeing ourselves as separate units, and seeing ourselves as more shared, the community.

Elana: Right. And that's what is so exciting and disappointing about the lesbian community, all at once. We have a vision that we might share a common destiny, but in fact, we don't. We don't come from a common destiny and we haven't devised any way, so far, to make it be that we do share a destiny. You know, in that way of community, of politics and economic base, a sense of relationship to each other that can't be broken up by...

Susan: ...class. The things that divide us.

Elana: It is the things that divide us. But it's also that we're in relation to the outside world. What were you going to say?

Jasmine: See, I'm caught. The way that I'm caught in this conversation is that I hear what you're saying and I feel like it's not jibing with something that I know about how you live your life. So, then I feel like I want to answer you on a personal level.

Elana: Uh-huh.

Jasmine: I feel like what stops you, or what stops not only you, Elana, but what stops that kind of community from happening, is fear. It's not so much that you can't get a loan. I hear you, but being in that business out there, and having gotten the loans, if I

could, you could. It's really being afraid, in my opinion, about who you're going to let in. And *that's* what I think it is. It's not you can't do it, but who are you going to keep out?

Cath: Well, the answer to that, in an ideal world, no one.

Elana: We don't live in an ideal world.

Jasmine: What I hear Elana saying is that, one you have intimate relationships. Two is that sometimes you think that the energy you put toward intimate relationships keeps you from forming larger and wider communities, and solving some problems on a community level. And three is that there are other problems that are keeping you and the group that you know, from solving those problems.

And what I'm saying is the main thing that keeps you from solving those problems is, in the wider group that you know, you've got to pick and choose. In that wider group that you know, picking and choosing who you want to keep out of the community is a big problem. And *that's* where friendship gets aborted.

Elana: Right. It becomes a really difficult problem. Well, go on with this example. The smaller the scale, the more difficult the problem becomes. But suppose we had, like, ten blocks of Oakland and 300 housing units, and in that group we're all lesbians. Then I would have to think about lesbians with boy children. You know? I mean, that would be my fear, that some day...

Susan: Well, that's what happened, actually, in a housing thing like that in Canada, is that it went on for years and years and years. And the boy children grew up, and then they had rights to those houses, or they assumed rights, or their mothers wanted them to have rights, and before you knew it, it was a lot of straight people living there. Over three generations it became a place where a lot of lesbians lived, but they didn't have control. But that's, I think, a failure of imagination, rather than a necessary conclusion.

Elana: It's not a necessary conclusion, but it is what keeps, it is like a fear that keeps me stopped.

Susanjill: But see, I think there's more to who you keep out. One of the things you said that rings true to me around fear is that, when we talk about who we have affinity for, we often find those who reflect our mirrors back to us, are the most comfortable, the most like us. So, I'm likely to have more friends who are dykes, middle-class, Jewish, fat, than not, for example. It's not serving me to continue to bond only from affinity, you know. So it's not

just a question of, well, there's some lesbians who avoid children, but there's also — you know, the lesbians at that conference who we're able to hug are not women who necessarily can find affinity in an easy way without making a very deliberate process of how we interact in community, to confront and resolve racism ...

[phone rings, Naja joins discussion by speaker phone, Val leaves]

So Naja, we've been talking about friendship as it relates to community, and what stops us ... I wondered if a way that we create friendship is too much from affinity, like who we're the most naturally comfortable with, without having to challenge our basic assumptions. So that I might be more likely to find myself with middle-class Jewish friends who are 40, than with an old or non-Jewish woman. That in order to create bonds that go as deeply and friendships that have as much sort of unspoken understanding, that much more work and pushing through has to happen. And then I questioned why I don't do that more, and then what it is in me that keeps me from being desirable to those other people? As a friend? The other part of it is, in spite of my politics, over time, I've noticed that there's a way that I've made excuses to be more exclusive than inclusive, in ways that concern me about how I go about making relationships.

Naja: Have other people already spoken on this? Like, am I coming in at the end of this conversation, or is it just beginning?

Susan: Sort of two-thirds of the way through.

Naja: I know for myself that I tend to have friendships that I guess are based on what SJ's calling affinity. I've been disabled, it's almost seven years, so it's hard for me to remember what kind of friendships I had before that. Since I've been so disabled I do tend to have friends that I can get support from around my illness. And there are different reasons for that. Partly, because the illness I have is very difficult for people who never experienced it to understand what it is. It's one of those illnesses that a lot of people don't believe in.

Susanjill: Which makes you somebody who people don't see.

Naja: Yeah. I've become pretty much homebound and bedbound and invisible in that way. Some of the people, I didn't want to have to put up with their ableist attitudes. A lot of women don't want to have to deal with how difficult my life is. Friends told me directly that they don't want to hear about my illness because it's not upbeat enough. I don't really have anything else to talk about. I end up having mostly relationships over the phone, because I

don't really have, other than my lover, anyone who I would call an intimate friend who is not a chronically ill person. And I wonder sometimes if I have allies or I have friends. There are women who I dislike who I feel like I've been sewn into a circle with, certainly because we all have this similar illness and we're pretty much the only people who can give each other support around it. Sometimes I feel pressure from an attitude in the lesbian community, from lesbians who don't necessarily have this illness, that we're all gonna be friends.

So, I think that sometimes when there's a particular issue that's up in your life, like being this disabled, or I suppose it could be the same for anyone, women of color or separatists or fat women, when there's an issue like that, that it's so difficult to get support from outside that community, you end up being in a small community of your own. And I'm not sure, sometimes, how much is being allies to each other and how much it's being friends, and how much we'd choose to be with those same women if this wasn't one of the few places where we could get support.

It just doesn't become worth it on a lot of levels for me to struggle. I don't know how that might be to women who have more energy, I pretty much get one or two hours a day and that's it. After a while, I became better at figuring out who was going to be worth trying to deal with, and who wasn't. Five years ago, I would have spent a lot more time trying to deal with a wider variety of women in my life. I don't know if you'd call it a clique or a support network, my own most intimate friendships are with other women with similar issues to mine.

Well, I don't know if I answered your question or not, or if any of this makes any sense, but I think I'm done now.

Cath: It does make sense, Naja. As you were talking, I started thinking about the issue of worth, and how much I'm willing to struggle to be close to people, in general, to be close to any particular person. The issue of worth, of whether or not it's worth it, hadn't occurred to me, but it *is* an issue.

Susan: The other part about having people who you relate to even though you don't care for them very much, because you share needs, that makes me think more about how lesbians with different interests and needs can form community around a purpose, the part they share, the need for a lesbian community, the need for mutual support networks, the need for all those things which may not come from a heart-to-heart but from a

different kind of love, a different kind of love and friendship, the political love.

Susanjill: When you're dealing on a survival level and you make your connections based on common need, it is not necessarily your option to base relationships as strongly on affection as people with more privilege, access and mobility.

Elana: I have the opposite fear, which is that if you don't have the privilege to come at it with affection, then the community can't last. Just on survival needs, unless the survival issue lasts forever.

Susan: But it doesn't always have to be on the edge. Survival can be based on our doing better when we are together, and we have close relationships with some of the people in this thing, and we have more distant relationships with others, but we share community for our greater good.

Caryatis: But community is not friendship. It's because everybody wants me to be friends with everybody that I cannot think about ten-block communities.

Jasmine: Exactly.

Caryatis: Community is a project, like any other. Like Sinister Wisdom, you know, we don't have to be one another's intimate friends. Work is one thing and friendship is another. It doesn't have to be first one, then the other. But, a community *is* larger than a friendship, it *is* going to be further from me. I can live in a ten-block radius from a lot of folks I'm not going to want to have dinner with twice a week. So, that has to be on a separate level. I don't want to be intimate with everyone.

Susanjill: Well, there's a quality, a presence to what intimacy means that you can't have with a lot of people.

Caryatis: And it could be that friendship and community interfere, but I think it goes the opposite of what you're saying. I think it's the urge to be friends in too many ways in too many places that keeps us from being able to build that community. If you don't ask that of me, I can build the damn buildings, you know, I can go live there, if you don't make me have dinner with everybody. If you separate them, I can do better, because community itself does not interfere with my friendships.

Jasmine: But friendships can interfere with community.

Caryatis: For me, it doesn't get in the way of this discussion to talk about lovers and friends, like we were earlier, because we *do* mess up our actual friendships right there, depending on whether we

do or do not have lovers, including when we do not. I think that's when we fuck with our friends the most.

Susanjill: What do you mean?

Caryatis: A lesbian has a lover. She also has, say, two friends, with whom she's fairly close. She and the lover break up, she finds herself with time on her hands. And instead of refocusing on whoever she is in the world, she starts spending more of that time, and in a more intimate way, with the friends. This is fucking with the friends, and it's fucking with the basis of the friendship. We lie to our friends by giving them more of ourselves than we *honestly* want them to have. It's our responsibility to watch what we do give our friends, that it is what we honestly want for them, that it is the amount and quality of time we want to spend with them. If I give you more friendship because I've broken up with my lover, you are very likely going to give me more intimacy in return. And then, where does that go if I decide to run off with somebody else? It means that I was lying to you all along.

Susanjill: The initial experience I had was of losing friends to lovers, rather than getting friends back who have lost lovers, but it definitely goes both ways. And I think you're right that the quality of whatever the connection is should be consistent regardless of what's spinning around.

Naja: Coming from the type of family background I came from, where there really wasn't any type of emotional support there, and there was a lot of abuse going on, I always looked to friends to be my family. And I often feel that incredible stab in the heart when women friends give me more intimacy when their lovers are gone, and then they withdraw it when they have new lovers. And I'm wondering if that comes from different women's definitions of friendship. I'm looking to that person as part of my family and she may have a totally different definition of friendship. Friendship, to her, may not mean family.

Susan: Caryatis, I think I heard you saying that there's some kind of right, or right amount, to give a friend. And then when a woman breaks up with her lover, and she gives more to that friend, that that's somehow not appropriate, or suitable even, or right for that relationship with the friend.

Caryatis: I think it's dishonest.

Susan: So, what you're saying is it would be better if this woman who breaks up with her lover just takes that energy that she had with the lover and do political work, or something. That is, *not*

spend more time with her friends. But sometimes women feel like they don't have enough time and energy to spend with their friends, and then when they have more time, they want to do that. And that can happen from breaking up with a lover, from losing a job, you know, different things happen.

Susanjill: Well, we also don't usually have the dilemma of trying to figure out on some hierarchical or value level whether our friends or our jobs are more important to us. With friends and lovers, I think we get confused about what and how we value each. I mean, we've all gone through this together. We get real caught up in this kind of hierarchical thing about, well, first there's lovers, then there's friends, then there's acquaintances or community or whatever this is. And that's not necessarily true, and I don't know that we ever get clear about that.

Cath: Some of the biggest fights I've had with lovers have to do with how much time I wanted to spend with my friends. So, I guess that it works both ways.

Elana: Being consistent about the level of honesty, the value that people have to you, the time you have for those relationships. And neither your need to feel loved or lovable nor your need to fill up your time when you're lonely should ...

Susanjill: ... is someone else's responsibility.

Elana: ... is somebody else's responsibility. Right.

Caryatis: Without regard to the cost to their emotions. When you offer greater intimacy, you will often take greater intimacy, you will get greater intimacy...

Susanjill: ...and then you'll eventually leave it.

Caryatis: Right. You're the one who's offered it on a false basis. This really bothers me. And it bothers me that we're such poor friends to ourselves. When somebody leaves my life, I may miss her tremendously, but I didn't love her because she took up a lot of my time. It doesn't mean we can't seek support for loneliness or loss or a difficult adjustment period. Yeah, you might spend a little more time, or a different kind of time with your friends, or one friend or lover, but that's a temporary thing and the person understands the basis on which it was offered.

Cath: Well, then too, Caryatis, how temporary is temporary? I mean, I haven't had a lover for six years. Am I going to sit there twiddling my thumbs or close my door and be all by myself for six years?

Elana: It's a hard thing to know — if you don't have a relationship that takes up that kind of lover time we think of, then do you go into or continue in your friendships as if you were going to have a lover, when you may not have a lover for another six years? Or do you say to your friends, I'm like this now, and I don't know how I'll be when I have a lover again.

Caryatis: When somebody disappears on me, or is suddenly way too present, expecting more of me than I thought was ever promised between us, or thought there was any reason for, I don't like it. I don't trust it.

Susan: So, you feel it's dishonest. It's because you have more time on your hands, it comes from your need and not from a greater affinity for me.

Caryatis: Yeah. I don't think we're here to fill each other's needs. I just don't think that's what it's about.

Naja: But isn't that why we have connection with each other on any level, is out of need? Whether we join political groups or have friendships or lovers or whatever, it's all out of some need.

Caryatis: No.

Naja: I wanted to join Sinister Wisdom out of a particular need. I didn't join Sinister Wisdom because I thought they needed help. Being as isolated as I am in my home, this is a way for me to do some political work and get some creative needs taken care of. And it was out of a selfish need. And I have friends out of a selfish need, because I need to have friends and I need to have connection and I need to have family. So I choose friends based on the emotional give and take I'm gonna have, if it's gonna be satisfying for both of us. But, it's definitely comes out of a selfish need.

Caryatis: It may just be words, Naja. I would say that that's what you *want* out of life, not what you *need*. I don't accept that kind of responsibility. I don't work on Sinister Wisdom because anybody else needs it to exist.

Elana: Well, there's a difference between want and need. I mean, everybody needs to eat, to go to the bathroom, to have a home, to not be cold. I *want*...

Susanjill: Yeah, I mean, the other thing is we also need quality in our lives. But I think the issue is, who's responsible to get it to us?

Elana: Nobody's responsible to get it to us.

Naja: Yeah, I agree with that point. I agree that nobody's responsible to get it to us. But I think that whatever we do, whether we

join political groups or have friendships or have lovers, we do it because of our needs. I don't think we do it because we want to take care of the other person.

Susanjill: But there is a greater sense. I mean, I also do the work because I need to see the world be different.

Susan: The question is whether that's a need or a want.

Susanjill: I need to! It's not a want.

Caryatis: I think it's an important distinction. We act like "want" isn't a very strong word. You *desire* to see the world different. But a *need*! To leave someone in desire of something is, like, not a crime on my part. But to leave someone needy places something on other people around you.

Cath: It sounds like you're confusing the specific with the general. I need friends. I think everyone needs special friends and the consequences to not having friends are people tend to be bitter and lonely. But they don't need *particular* people. Like, I need friends. If you were my best friend it wouldn't mean that you have to stay around forever.

Caryatis: I see.

Cath: Just like, I need to eat, you can cook. It doesn't mean you have to cook for me

Susanjill: But she's just saying that she's not providing you with friendship to fill your needs, she's being your friend because she likes you.



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Writing by women of color welcomed.

small acts

this is a poem for you, ellen
because i've seen you gaze beyond hundreds
cheering in a lesbian-gay parade,
like a farm woman
looking over fields scarred by the plow, knowing
the ripening gold, the autumn sun

and in a smaller town, fifty of us
and fifty hecklers, gangly boys
in lettermen jackets,
leering and clutching their giggly girlfriends,
"hey, let's see you do it"
you glared and walked through that crowd
and they parted
like weeds in a strong, clean wind
you tried to make them listen
i was barely brave enough to look

this is a poem for you because
your eyes clouded
and your voice went small and tired
i comforted you in a public space
a very small act my arm around your back
and this poem is for you, ellen, because
your hair rippled softly on your shoulders
and i touched it a bit too much,
your head on my shoulder
a moment too long suddenly a voice
above a white-shirted belly
"girls, let's have the proper conduct
in a public restaurant,
we don't want children seeing that"

this poem is for you, ellen, because
you can see
the seeds pushing slowly out of this earth
this poem is for you because i know
you're tired of waiting
yet you can feel the earth turn slowly
to the growing season soon



untitled
Sudie Rakusin

Terri de la Peña

Palabras*

(For K.A.)

A letter surrounds the audio cassette, but I put it aside and slide the cassette into place in the stereo. The advancing tape makes a faint whoosh when I adjust the volume. Her musical voice greets me. I imagine her shy smile, her candid eyes.

She tells me about her job hunt, her short story's progress, details of a women's conference. Her voice soothes and relaxes me. I feel my end-of-the-week tension ebb.

Like her, I work for a living and write for pleasure. We are natural recluses on weekends and evenings, creating characters in our solitude. Pisceans, we are 13 months apart and live in coastal communities on different ends of the state. I am more connected to her than to my local friends. And to think, we met by fluke.

We both attended a writers' workshop in Oregon, and went white-water rafting with thirteen other women. The photos show us side by side, but we hardly spoke. The lone Chicana, I was attracted to her tawny skin and dark hair; I also liked her quiet manner. But I did not know how to approach her. She seemed so self-contained, almost aloof.

One evening, she read a story — a western. It reminded me of my teenaged cowboy yarns. I was captivated, not only by her narrative, but also by her presentation. When one of her characters sang, her voice was lilting, magical. What had happened to my silent rafting companion? She had become saucy Marie, hands on her hips, warbling a tune for her lover. I was amazed by the transformation.

In the dining hall the next day she seemed embarrassed by my compliments, surprised that I had once written westerns. I confided my dream of eventually creating "southwesterns" — from a Chicana point of view. We were both intrigued by that prospect before she hurried off to her fiction class.

By the river, I worked on my novel, but she did not leave my mind. When that week ended, we promised to keep in touch.

* Words (Spanish)



Listening to her, I ponder how words meld us. Four months into our correspondence she sends a cassette, starting an oral tradition. Hearing her voice again thrills me — she still sounds shy but very pleased with herself for introducing a new aspect to our communication. I wonder if I can meet her challenge.

My first tape is self-conscious, filled with frantic starts and stops. Hours later, I carefully ink the date and “Palabras” on the label. Before long, we both have a pile of cassettes, dated and marked “Palabras.” We rarely speak by phone.



In the summer, we again spend a week in Oregon, this time sharing a cabin with two other writers. Our mutual shyness vanishes; we greet each other like long-lost sisters, although I am often jarred at seeing her rather than hearing her as a disembodied voice. We share long conversations, critique each other’s manuscripts, write side by side far into the night. I cherish our closeness. Usually I work alone, but her nearness does not distract me; it heightens my creativity. By week’s end, we reluctantly say goodbye and promise to meet in San Francisco in mid-October.



The evening news reports the Loma Prieta earthquake. I panic, wondering if she has survived. The broadcasters offer little about her seaside community, but their graphics show its proximity to the quake’s epicenter. For hours I unsuccessfully try to reach her by phone.

In the morning I write, asking her to call collect. Meanwhile, I continue trying to contact her. For days, I hear nothing. I feel helpless, frustrated, unable to concentrate. On Friday I receive her mailgram, and on Sunday morning she phones, sounding tired but plucky, offering a personal perspective of the shattering events.

Since then, I have received not only her letters, tapes, manuscripts, clippings and book reviews, but also her ongoing commentary about the rebuilding of the quake-damaged community. Her courage and resilience buoy me. And whenever I falter from emotional upsets, I remind myself that our friendship, with a mutual love of palabras and writing as its foundation, has not allowed distance — nor even an earthquake — to topple it.

Mary A. White

Sarah

I went to pick up my best friend Sarah at the airport on Saturday morning. She lives in Brooklyn Heights and called this her first Florida visit as a snow-bird. I live in Orlando now but we grew up in Miami together, and it was late-summer, not winter.

Sarah appeared at the airport with chopsticks sticking out of her long dreadlocks. "DeeDee, " she said. Her voice is loud. "Have you lost weight, girl?"

"Not really," I said.

"You look skinny to me. Here's your little present." She searched in one of her bags, a colorful, weaved affair.

I said, "Don't give it to me now. Wait."

"For what?"

"Til we get home. I can't open it now."

So Sarah put her arms around me. "Have you missed me, bighead?"

"Nope. Not at all," I laughed.

We went out for pad thai noodles that night. The restaurant has a lot of fish mobiles, painted blue. Sarah loved it. She bought me round, yellow earrings.

"These might be too wild for you," she warned. I know she gives me jewelry with that hope.

She started her real antics Sunday. There's a laundromat behind my apartment and we were washing the dirty clothes she'd brought with her when two white men came in out of an old blue pick-up truck. Both had brown hair. I stood, my arms folded, watching our dryer. They couldn't see Sarah because she was around the corner, reading on a bench.

"Yep," one said. "You haven't heard about her?"

"No," the other replied with a laugh behind his voice. "I haven't."

"She used to come in. Right through that door. Open up your washer, take some of your clothes and leave. She took a shirt of Al's.

"You gotta be kidding."

"Nope." He pushed his clothes deeper into the water.

"She might be retarded or something."

They left out the side door. I looked out of the window and saw the back of their truck leaving. It wasn't completely night out yet, dusk. Sarah was at my side then, whispering.

"Let's do it," she said. "Let's be her."

"What?"

"Come on. Quick. Get my clothes." Sarah started to take her clothes out of the dryer.

I laughed. I whispered, "No."

"Yes. Hurry."

I hopped from one foot to the other, while Sarah opened the men's washer and took out a handful of their dripping clothes.

"Wait." Sarah was choking trying not to laugh. "Note. A note. Let's leave a letter."

I was at the door. "Let's go. Now."

We left, walking quickly down the sidewalk. "Hurry up. I can barely believe you," I said. "That was dumb."

"Let's write a note as soon as we get home."

"No," I spelled. "N - o."

"Okay. Maybe not."



I went to work on Monday but called Sarah during my breaks and we met for lunch. She wanted directions to the library, and seemed a little restless but then she read me two chapters from Nella Larsen that night.

I called her when I got in on Tuesday morning to tell her to put the beans on. Then I called her on my morning break just to chat.

"Quit calling," Sarah said. "You should take a day off if you want to talk so much."

She called me back in the afternoon. "Hey. What're you doing?"

"Working."

"Can you talk?"

"Nope."

"DeeDee."

"Really. I'm busy. I'll have to call you back."

But I didn't. Then I didn't say much at dinner either. She'd hurt

my feelings. I cooked black bean soup. Her favorite with stewed tomatoes.

"This place is a mess," I said later that night. "Could you put those bottles away tomorrow? And fold your clothes."

Sarah brews her own hair things and she brought these huge glass bottles of her oil and conditioner. It's all dark and these leaf remnants cling to the inside belly of her jars. The oil has a musky, wet velvet scent. All the bottles lay on the floor in front of the closet. One glinted in the light behind the door.

Sarah was in bed for the night. "Oh. Be quiet," she said.

"And keep your hair off my pillow," I told her.

She sighed and moved her head over. "It's not even over there."

"It is. And all this stuff really stinks."

"It does not," Sarah's voice was rising.

"Yes, it does," I said. "It stinks."

"It does not."

"Yes it does. And they're everywhere."

"No they're not. This is so dumb."

"This *is* dumb," I agreed.

"You're dumb." Sarah turned over. "I don't even get to see you."

"Child please." I got my pillow and took the blanket off the bed. In the living room, I turned the fan on, and made a bed on the floor. Sarah came out.

"You're sleeping out here?"

"What do you think?"

She stood with her hands on her hips.

"You knew I had to work before you came," I said.

"You take the bed. I'll sleep out here."

"No. It stinks in there."

Sarah sighed for my benefit then went back into the bedroom.



We went grocery shopping on Wednesday night and near the produce section we saw this other black woman. She had a short afro and she was dark, nearer Sarah's complexion; banana after you get it home brown. I noticed she wore white flats. I never wear white shoes.

"There," Sarah whispered. "There's a sister. Go speak."

"Don't even try it." I turned away.

But Sarah cautiously looked for the woman down our aisles. We picked up bean curd, olives, salmon patties, and apple juice. After we were outside, we saw the other woman getting into her car.

"Hey!" Sarah handed me her bag and quickly walked over to the woman. "Excuse me. Excuse me," Sarah said.

I unlocked the car door and put the bags in. I got in, and rolled the window down because it was so hot out. The other woman sat in her car, an old white Volvo, with one leg out the door. I watched them talk. Then Sarah pointed to me. The other woman leaned out, shaded her eyes and smiled in my direction. I let go a deep sigh.

The woman waved as she drove away. Sarah practically hopped into my car. She laughed and squeezed my arm.

"She is fantastic. I told her we might stop by. Lettie. Her name's Lettie. Oh, Dee. And you will not believe. She's in this African-American dance thing."

"I will kill you," I said.

Sarah touched my arm. "Dee. Dee."

"I'm gonna kill you," I repeated.

"I'm doing this for you," she said. "You're the one down here all lonely. You need the friends."

"You are more than enough, Sarah," I said. "And is that how you think I make my friends?"

"You don't have any now. I'm not here."

"You should go visit your crummy mother."

"You'd better watch your mouth. And don't tell me what to do."

"Yes."

"And don't scream at me either," Sarah said.

At home, I picked up one of Sarah's shirts. It has a print of some green, jungle pattern. I said, "I am kicking you out," and threw the shirt out the front door. "I've had it with you," I told her.

Sarah said, "Stop, Dee."

I went into the bedroom and took Sarah's silver sandals, another shirt and a pair of slacks from the closet. I threw them outside. The sandals slapped against the front porch and the neighbor's Rottweiler started barking.

Sarah had gone into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of warm, red wine. "Leave my stuff alone," she said.

I threw her red suitcase out. I went into the bathroom and found her earrings and her cowrie shell bracelets. So I put them out. It was still as hot as a baking oven in the early evening.

I sat down at the dining room table. "Pour me some, too."

Sarah poured wine into my favorite white teacup and placed it on the table in front of me, then she opened the house door. I watched her start to get her things.

"I'm still kicking you out," I said.

When she leaned over to pick up her shoes, some loose change fell from her shirt pocket.

"I keep my change," I told her, "in my pants pocket." Sarah didn't answer. She started picking up her coins and came closer to the front door.

"Be careful," I said. "There's a black widow in that corner."

Sarah paused. The black widows, and there were at least two, were there when I'd moved in. I thought it a good sign. One lived on either side of my door way.

I yawned for Sarah's benefit; she's terrified of spiders. "Yeah. Leave a penny for my black widow," I said.

Sarah put her change back in her shirt pocket. "What's she gonna buy me?"

"Common sense." I had to laugh.



I tried to tie it all together. We'd fight as kids too. Fist fights then.

"We fight too much," I said. We were cooking dinner together.

"Sometimes," Sarah said.

"Should we even still be friends together?"

"Yeah. We've got to stay together." She asked, "Remember you gave me that drink?"

"What?"

"That *special* drink, girl."

I laughed. In junior high school I made Sarah a tall glass of water, hot sauce, black pepper, and orange juice with dish soap on top.

"You could've smelled it," I said.

"I trusted you. It was an immediate exercise of trust on my part."

"So now you're back to torment me."

"Yep. We got to stay together." She put her hand over mine.

"Wash those off."

"You're not supposed to wash mushrooms. You brush them."

"See. Stuff like that makes me mad."

"You're just crazy."

"You act like a know-it-all." I paused. "But you're the only person I would've given that drink to."

"Oh. So I was the target death."

"That's not it."

"Well that's why you shouldn't try to kill me, dumb dumb. You should just love me."

"Yeah. I love me," I laughed. "I meant you. I love you."

"Oh. My sweet pea," Sarah said. She held me. "I love *you*."

"What a sap. But we fight so much."

"If you knew how to act better we wouldn't," Sarah said, cutting celery.

"If you knew how to act better we wouldn't," I said and kissed her on the shoulder.



I took Friday off. We rode around, thrift shopping. We got tired of getting in and out of the hot car so we went into Disney World and ate lunch at an out-door Vienna cafe. We safely did some more grocery shopping.

Before dinner Sarah said, "Let's call her. That woman I met."

I squeezed more lemon juice over our salad.

"I told her I would," Sarah said.

I curled my lips. "I don't care."

Sarah called and we were invited over for later. The woman, Lettie, gave long detailed directions to her house.

"How does she sound?" I asked.

"Nice," Sarah said. "She sounds nice." Nice is nearing the limit of her descriptive powers.

Lettie lived about twenty minutes northeast of downtown. There were old-fashioned, dim and intimate street lamps by her apartment. Lettie and Sarah hugged each other like old friends,

while I was introduced. Lots of cats seemed to be walking away from the door.

"Welcome. Welcome," Lettie said.

She went to the refrigerator and got out a bowl of kiwi fruit, apples, and one grapefruit. We talked about the weather.

Lettie said she was a botanist. Her oleanders in the second green house were acting funny. Sarah asked for a bowl to eat the grapefruit, then talked about New York. Lettie remembered she had good friends in Soho. She said she'd been married but now her son lived with her ex-husband in New Jersey.

Later, she lead us through her house, room to room. She showed us pictures of her friends, lakes. There were some of her when she had long, permed hair. We all returned to our same seats in the living room.

Sarah and Lettie laughed about meeting at the store. Lettie owned that she'd wanted to ask Sarah about her dreads but was too afraid. So they talked about their hair.

I could not believe we'd been there so long. They talked about the dance troupe. I heard Sarah say, "DeeDee is gonna love seeing that." They exchanged addresses and promised to keep in touch.

Duke, the black and white cat, now jumped up on the table. He leaned over my glass and drank the water. I stared at the big cat on the coffee table.

"It's okay," Lettie said. "Is that okay with you? I let them do that here."

"Your cats are beautiful," Sarah said.

"And you're leaving Sunday?" Lettie asked her.

"Yeah. But my family's in Miami and my best friend's here, so I'll be back," Sarah told her.

I yawned. I glanced at the door for Sarah's benefit.

"Those animals are disgusting," I said in the car.

Sarah turned the radio on. "I like her."

The night before she left Sarah said, "Hey. I want to show you something. Do you have a flashlight?"

"No, I don't." I started to look anyway. I found a candle on the mantelpiece. Sarah lit it.

"What are you doing?" I asked. It's okay, I thought. She's leaving tomorrow.

Sarah smiled, excited. She said, "Shhhh." She started to whisper. "Nothing. Come with me."

She walked to the front door and turned the porch light off. "Come on," she whispered and motioned for me to follow her outside.

We stood on the front porch. The night air felt cool. Sarah held the candle near the left side of the door. A black widow lay there in a web, belly up.

"Look at her middle," Sarah whispered. She pointed. "There. Can you see it?"

I saw an orange, imperfect hourglass on the spider's round middle. I turned away.

"What're you showing me that for?" I asked.

"I just wanted you to see it." Sarah blew the candle out. "I guess I wanted to see it," she laughed.



She left Orlando on Sunday afternoon. She said she'd call when she got in.

"Quit calling so much and learn how to write," I said.

"All right. You take care of yourself." Sarah cried.

"I will," I said and cried too. "I will."

We waved until she went into the open door.

How I Get Started In A Life Of Crime

All my life my curly red hair has pressed me into predetermined patterns of behavior: rambunctious as a toddler, mischievous as a youth, revolutionary in my university years, a brief respite of docility during an equally brief marriage, and finally, today, open hostility. Longing towards anarchy and terrorism. And I am mean, ornery, and bad-tempered. Nasty, if at all possible. Which I hope will stay with me until I die or am killed in open combat with gynecologists.

Gynecologists? Who could have a hard word against this race of Hippocratic saints? Just because, for example, I am sitting in the large waiting room of the Jerusalem Gyno Clinic with 30 other women — all waiting for a 4:30 p.m. appointment with the same doctor. Yes, typical. This is a Middle Eastern rite that famous gynecologists have adopted to drive their patients into a frenzy.

You can well imagine what this situation — waiting with 30 others for a 4:30 appointment with the same gyno — would do to a woman like me. No damn good, I tell you. Makes me think of gynocide. And so my mind is plotting a war against all licensed gynecologists, and figuring out who in this room could join forces with me, when a small and grave looking woman leans across the aisle and asks me if she can borrow the newspaper in my lap.

I give it to her with a grimace, and she smiles back, unwarranted. Not tough enough, no backbone, and I dismiss her as a potential hit woman. Now how about that huge Bedouin woman across the room, the one in the embroidered black dress, squatting children at her feet, her face striated menacingly with blue tattoos? My kind of soldier. Officer material, if ever there was. And the teenager in jeans dragging long, devil-may-care drags from her unfiltered cigarette? Another good soldier. Soon I pick out 10 or 12 women who can join the inner corps of this secret society and march with me down the hospital corridors, knocking down the doors of every gynecologist, wrapping them immobile in the waxy rolls of paper that they unravel on their cots, ramming specularia down their throats, and plunging a stirrup rod deep into the heart of each. What an endearing thought.

And while thus pleasantly engaged, my newspaper is returned to me by that sweet young thing in a sun-dress, batting her eyes at

the world and saying in my general direction, "Awful how these doctors think they're God Almighty, don't you think?"

I look at her and consider if powerful motivation is enough to overcome natural refinement. She looks right back at me and smiles again, a pert and light smile that bares a set of straight and sharp white teeth.

"Good teeth," I say thoughtfully.

"Not very useful on the gynos," she says still smiling, "though dentists know better than to keep me waiting too long."

And she keeps smiling at me. And I am looking at her more than mildly surprised, but not about to let on about the secret society until I have better evidence that she's not a mole.

"Come here a lot?" I finally ask.

"Once a month for hormone treatments," she says, and I look at her well-shaped torso, wondering if she's trying to get pregnant or has had a transsexual operation, but then she adds, "I'm 65 years old and just had a hysterectomy, so I get hormone shots because I don't get my period any more."

"Uh-huh," I say and begin to search her pink face and breast tops for wrinkles, even dropping my eyes hoping for a glimpse of a varicose vein in her neatly tanned and folded legs. Finally I check her long auburn hair for telltale roots, but none are visible.

"Impressive, isn't it?" she asks.

"Uh-huh," I say again, impressed, and continue to survey and admire her hormones.

She picks up her bag and crosses the aisle to sit down next to me, to keep our conversation intimate. "And you?" she asks.

"Pap smear," I say, embarrassed that I wait on line to smear.

Now there's a silence between us that neither of us is prepared for, she having moved across the aisle for more than two words apiece. After a while she leans over and whispers into my ear, "Fuck gynecologists."

"No fun at all," I say from limited experience.

"Not surprising," she says to me, and we both frown.

It's quiet for a while and we watch the deadly action in the stark green and grim waiting room. Kids are dragging things out of purses, husbands are nodding off to sleep, and women are contemplating the manifold ways to torture one's soul by way of the cervix. The only diversion is the steady stream of urine rendered and duly labeled. Calling us all for 4:30 is an act of obscenity, and I can see the humiliation and anger creep under the pasty skin and into the eyes of the waiting women.

"Gets me damn angry," the young-old lady says to me. I don't even look up, knowing my eyes have developed the waiting-room glaze.

"Damn angry," she says again. "Why don't we *do* something about this?" She turns to me grabbing my arm, and suddenly she shakes my army into memory, blazing my anger anew.

"Get the fire hatchet," I hiss, my fever rising. "Break down the doors and bludgeon them all to death."

"Withhold business, withdraw favors," she slyly whispers.

"Give them an enema through their mouths, an episiotomy in their asses, shave their delicate parts, plunge a stirrup through their hearts, crucify, crucify!" I am hissing and leering, but not incoherent.

"Good idea," she says. We fall silent, admiring our convictions.

"I tend more to the surreptitious," she finally says, and in a most ladylike voice. "Poisoning, arson, fraud — that sort of thing."

"Uh-huh," I nod, but that sets me off thinking. It takes a while, but finally I get off the question. "For hire?"

"Of course for hire," she says, her sharp little teeth smiling at me persuasively. "Otherwise I just could not afford it, my dear."

That makes sense, of course. I sit around and mull that over in my mind, watch a few kids club each other to emergency room status, and then allow myself to think out loud with her.

"Do you ever take on a project with someone else, just for the fun of it, I mean not that making money couldn't be part of it — but I mean do something together just for sharing the good time?"

"Oh, that would depend entirely on the nature of the work ... and the nature of the partner, of course."

"Of course."

"I think some jobs were meant to be done alone, but I'm not opposed on principle" — here she blows her nose for effect and shifts her tan legs — "on *principle* I enjoy cooperation and team spirit."

We sit that way for a while, and I know this is my chance of a lifetime. Will I blow it? From obscure, meaningless, irrelevant existence, to daring, bravado, a flying trapeze. Blow it? Not me. I never lose anything by taking too long to decide.

"Let's do it," I say.

"Do what, my dear?" she asks mildly.

"Anything," I say.

"Perhaps banking?" she softly asks, the inquiry of a friendly teller in her eyes.

"Banking," I smile in pleasure. "Yes, banking sounds just right."
"Something along the lines of a little heist?" she sweetly asks, holding up the robbery like a sheer negligee.

"Yes, yes!" I gasp, "That's it!"

Her smile is meltingly sweet, but her soft hand shakes very well indeed.



Now neither Hasia nor I have any previous experience in this field of endeavor, which does not daunt either of us. Her background is rich in shoplifting, pilfering the petty cash box, and walking off with the occasional collection plate from some yeshiva of whose politics she does not approve. She teaches me a few techniques.

We board the bus No. 18 at the busy Jaffa Street station, Hasia shoving the people ahead of her in line.

"Stop pushing!" she calls out annoyed to an imaginary youth behind her. "These children!" she clucks to the woman in front with the half-opened handbag, who no longer possesses her wallet. We get off the bus at the King David Hotel, take herbal tea in the lobby as we carefully remove the bills, and turn in the billfold at Lost and Found to prevent misuse of credit cards. Hasia puts her arm through mine as we stroll out of the rococo entrance.



Until now, Hasia had never planned a major crime, but took advantage of situations that had fallen into her lap. Now she is hard at work planning.

"A challenge," she clucks, "A bank is a real challenge to one's mind." Hasia used to be Secretary to the Dean of Students at Hebrew University, and I take encouragement from the educated way she has of expressing herself. Me, I work at random jobs, turning small businesses into non-profits. A real Robin Hood. Temporarily unemployed. Now we spend a lot of time together, market surveying, as Hasia calls it.

We make trip after trip to all the banks downtown, and finally settle on the Bialik Branch of the National Bank and Trust Company. A nice bank, named after a poet. It's modern, well-lit, polite — we are both turned on by the natural juice counter beside the liquid assets desk and best of all it is small and off the main street. Their security guard is new and inexperienced, and a bus conveniently stops opposite the front door. We take the bus back to her apartment where Hasia fixes us some camomile tea.

"What do you think?" I ask Hasia, as respectful of her brains as I am of her good looks.

"Tough, very tough," she says screwing up her eyes and concentrating. "This operation will require resourcefulness, intelligence, and careful planning."

Her words start my blood flowing. Give me a hard job to get my teeth into, let me utilize all these wiry, health-food muscles that have been nourished all these years on yogurt and dal soup. My lithe brown body longs to try its cobra position on bank clerks.

"Can you handle a weapon?" she asks, and saliva almost dribbles down my T-shirt.

"I can handle *anything*," I say with fervor and total faith.

"We may be able to do without," she says, "but let's keep that option open." She downs the tea like a shot of whiskey and again I search her skin, her hair for telltale scars and roots. None visible. I scan the contents of her two-room tenement for generation gap clues.

"Your parents?" I ask of a yellowed couple decorating the cheap furniture in various poses.

"No. That's Jack and me before the operation," she says.

I am never overly polite, and I pick it up and study it closely. "You were good looking," I say, "but Jack wasn't anything to write home about."

"But devoted," says Hasia. "This hormone treatment was his idea. And he was religious about getting me to take the pills. If I miss even one day, it shows by evening. 'A young good-looking wife,' he would say, 'nothing like it.'"

"And brainy too," I add.

"But he didn't know that," says Hasia, and I get angry at Jack who only made love to her tits.

"You are a smashing lady, Hasia, and poor Jack could have asked me for a lesson or two about the merchandise out there, and about how you are real quality, at any age and from any point of view, and the sonofabitch never knew it."

"Now look here, Ella," says Hasia, and I am wondering what I have said wrong. "My body is beautiful, no doubt, and my mind is a razor, that's clear, but we have to get one thing straight between us if we're going to become partners in crime."

"What's that?" I ask, waiting for the worst.

"We're here in a business relationship. Rob the bank and then see if we want to do another joint venture. But no getting involved personally. I'm not your mother and not your sister and not your

friend. This is purely a business arrangement. Is that clear?"

Oh, yes, Hasia, this helps me eliminate three things that you are not to me. Not my mother, not my sister, not my friend. But what are you to me, Hasia? "Yes," I say in my sly way, "I completely understand." Mmmmm, yes, I understand. "All you mean to me is crime, Hasia." Mmmmm, just crime ...

This seems to satisfy her.



As the day of the heist approaches, Hasia and I work even harder. We make many trips to the bank, carefully study its layout and staff, examine the local bus schedule. Bus 22 doesn't run often, but it does run on time. We put the final touches on the tools and equipment we will need, running through rehearsals like opening night in Tel Aviv.

The more I see her style, her swift way with words, her careful planning, the more I admire her. Night after night we work late, practicing line-delivery, movement, handling of the various personnel in the bank, client relations. We run through a number of scenarios, based on security being alerted. We practice the get-away. Every detail Hasia likes settled in advance, and I really dig the rehearsals.

"Well, time to hit the hay, Ella," says Hasia, with little appreciation of how my mind interprets those words.

"Hit the hay, Hasia," I repeat in full agreement. And then Hasia stands there, right in the middle of that cozy Talpiot tenement, her hands upon her hips, and tilts her head to one side, waiting. Nice tilt.

"What's it gonna be, Ella," she asks me, "a long walk home or the hard floor beside my bed?"

"I'll start on the floor, Hasia," says I in my cool little style.

"Suit yourself," says Hasia and starts to fix herself for bed, throwing a sleeping bag down on the floor beside her.

I take off my clothes and climb in. The cool nylon of the bag tingles my warm body. I watch her adjust her night things, floss her teeth, go to the shower, and come back, a few wisps of hair stuck piously to her temples.

"Long shower," I say, making conversation.

"You can take one, too," she says, and I feel that's got to be some sort of invitation.

I struggle to my feet in the sleeping bag and hop over to the door of the shower.

"Don't look," I say, in some agony, and leave her cackling as I

race into the shower. She is calmed down by the time I come out wrapped into 3 towels.

"Now find a comfortable place to sleep and let's get some rest," she says.

What can I do? I know an invitation when I hear one. I hop into her bed and pull the covers around me.

"Aaargh!" says Hasia, "aaargh!"

"Is that Celtic?" I ask, showing that I have completed some years of schooling.

"It's international, Ella, and it means keep your hands where they belong."

My plan now is to doze off deeply for 30 minutes, and then to awaken fully and get to work. But it's too late; I fall asleep and awaken the next morning to the smell of hot oatmeal cooking with brewer's yeast.

From the bed my farsighted eye watches her soft morning contours as she stirs the porridge. My near sighted eye contemplates her empty pillow.

"I was going to tell you the story of my life," I say disappointed.

"Wait until I ask," says Hasia, adding raisins.



Finally the day of the heist. I wake up to clear crisp weather, a perfect day, the birds singing, only my stomach is feeling the crunch. I put on my clean Rights for Women t-shirt, jeans and sneaks, and get to Hasia's at 10 o'clock. She opens the door and looks smashing in an open tank top and slim pants on contoured Birkenstock sandals.

"How you doing?" asks Hasia.

"Cool, real cool," I say, holding in my diarrhea. She looks at me sharply. I walk in and sit down. "Get a good night's sleep?" I ask, just to make conversation.

"Great," says Hasia. "But *you* don't look ready for the Olympics. You feeling okay?"

"A little stomach flu, maybe."

"I have something for that," says Hasia, and walks over to her ample shelf of pills. "Take this, it'll cheer you up in no time."

I swallow 1 green and 3 pink capsules, by Hasia's well-measured orders. I try to put together our tools and accessories, but my stomach is rebelling. My guess is that the root cause is higher up than my bowels. I lie down on Hasia's bed and writhe around in discomfort.

Hasia's heart finally softens and she comes over to the bed and

sits down. She takes my hand, and that's already a ray of sunlight.

"I know how you're feeling, Ella."

"How could you know, Hasia, you're all ice water and estrogen." I say this to hurt her. By her silence, I figure it worked. "I'm sorry," I say, "I didn't mean it."

"No, you *did* mean it," says Hasia. "You're right, I don't allow myself to feel enough."

"Aw, you're okay, Hasia, nothing that won't mellow over the years. Invite me back when you get into wrinkles again." That feels lousy, but I guess I wanted to say it. This feels like Judgment Day, and honesty does well. But now I feel double lousy, and I turn my back to her and nurse my groaning interiors. I am thus completely absorbed, when I feel a warm body move against me.

"Is that Hasia out there?" I whisper.

"Affirmative."

This is a new sensation. "Something special or just feel like human contact?"

"Something special," she says in a crooked voice.

"That's nice," I say.

"I have to ask you something serious, Ella," she says to me in a tone I never heard before, and it makes my ears flair. "Were you serious when you said that about wrinkles and being mellow? Don't you hate old age, Ella?"

Oh, the mean and ornery in me is feeling like meltdown. I roll over and find myself suddenly right up against her pink face. It looks at me like a moon, and I can't help but put my warm hand on it. We lock eyes.

"Hasia, you were turning into a beautiful old lady. If you want to be old again, I can dig it. I'd help you comb your hair and cut your toenails. If you would have me."

She looks me hard into the eyes. Waiting, weighing. "We'll see later," she finally says. "By evening it will show."

"Show what?" I ask.

"We'll talk about it later. There's time."

"I'll cook dinner," I say. "Nothing fried or salted."

She searches my eyes with a little flicker of something like hope or fear. It would be so nice to stay in bed today and fear together. But Hasia is real goal-oriented. She gives me a quick hug and pulls me up. My stomach feels great. It's 11 and we are ready to roll.



We arrive at the Bialik Branch of the National Bank and Trust Company and glance up and down the road. No one near. Hasia

scotch-tapes to the door a neatly printed sign: "Security System Being Tested. We apologize for the inconvenience." I glance down at my watch. 11:27. We enter the bank.

I walk over to the teller for foreign currency and ask to purchase dollars for 1,000 shekel. He sets the safe to open in 10 minutes. He motions me to the chair and I sit down. My head is beginning to itch from the wig.

Hasia is on line for the mechanical teller. Through my own dark glasses I can see her dark glasses covering her dark eyes. She glances at me and moves her mouth slightly. I imagine that this is a smile, and I am grateful. When she reaches the computer, she taps in a few numbers and waits for the response. She is ordering the list of bargain savings accounts being offered this month. When the printer spits up the paper, she puts it neatly into her purse and comes over to sit down next to me.

10 minutes are up. 11:39. The teller nods me over. Hasia takes her place near the security guard at the door. I walk over to the foreign currency teller, my heart somewhere behind my eyeballs, and hand him my marketing basket.

"Fill her up," I say in my best imitation of anybody else.

He looks up, first with a question in his eyes, and then I blow away the question by pointing to my pocket. My hand is inside, making a decent size bulge. "You don't want me to use this," I say to him, "your children would never forgive you. Just fill this up with all the little green bills you got inside that vault." He takes the basket and proceeds to throw into it packets of green currency. Nobody has noticed us yet, not even security. He hands me back the basket and I thank him for it.

"You won't get out of here," he says to me.

"No lip from you, Bialik capitalist," I reply and wink behind my shades. Cool, Ella, cool! Just as I am congratulating myself and backing away, the teller tells on me.

"Thief! Stop her! Robbery!" he shouts and ducks under the counter. He has also tripped the alarm from somewhere out of sight. His shouting and the alarm cause quite a stir.

There are only a few bank inhabitants, but they react at once in various forms of panic. The tellers are pressing their buttons and climbing under the tables. Two bank customers throw themselves on the floor, as well-trained soldiers often do. The president of the bank has come out of his cubicle and is shouting, "What's the meaning of this? Where's the thief? I want a report right now!" And the security guard, who has finally grasped the

meaning of it all, is helped by Hasia to remove the gun from his holster, where Hasia promptly empties the shells onto the floor, quite professionally, even from within her white kid gloves. Practice does make perfect.

This panic is contagious, and I am beginning to feel it come on me like the flu. But then Hasia masterfully takes over.

"Everyone get down on the floor and close your eyes," she says, loud and firm. "There's nothing to fear if you do as you're told. Nobody move for 10 minutes. When the buzzer rings, you can get up."

I grab the market basket and we walk out — slowly, deliberately — into the bright, sunny day. 11:43. Sixteen minutes inside. We cross the street and Bus 22 rolls up, right on schedule. Hasia gets in and gives the driver 2 shekel and takes change. We go to the back of the bus and sit down. I am still clutching the marketing bag, to my surprise. My heart is beating furiously, ripping apart the inside of my brains. We don't say anything.

"How are you, Ella?" she finally asks.

"Nauseous," I say, betraying my self-image. "And you?"

There's a bit of a pause. "Tired," she finally says. "All this is very taxing."

We get off on Jaffa Street and walk up toward the market place. We cut behind the stalls and remove our jackets, wigs, and dark glasses, dumping them into the rotten produce bin under a bunch of dead bananas. Back in the market, we buy some lettuce and place it over the currency in the bag.

"Want a bite?" I ask Hasia, my appetite returning as the victory begins to sink in. "Fallafel? Humus? Spinach-burger?"

"Just home," says Hasia.

I look at her tired eyes and hail a cab.

At home, Hasia goes right over to her bed and lies down. No discussion. No mulling over the heist. No remorse and no pride. And no counting of bills. I know something is going on real deep inside her but I can't guess what. I cover her with a blanket and notice that my heart has regained its normal lurch in her presence.

I am worried about Hasia, but, frankly, yes that's me, no denying it, I am also trying to estimate our loot. Would it be polite to count it before Hasia wakes up? I finally decide it would be — I can always pretend that I haven't — and I remove the dirty lettuce and put it in the fridge. The bills come next.

I am counting: 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 ... 15, 16, 17 ... 36, 37, 38. Whoopie! 38,000 dollars!! Enough for a great trip to the Far East.

Enough for a nice car. A down payment on a new flat. No work for another year. Whoopie!! I am celebrating, feeling elated, and it is quite surprising to me that Hasia, ice blood Hasia, finds this time to take a nap.

I walk over to check if she's asleep. Wouldn't this be the right time for tea together? Or even wine? Or — let's admit it — champagne?

I study her sleeping face. It looks tired, more tired than I have ever seen it. There are lines forming on her forehead that I have not seen there before. Her skin looks pale, has lost its pink flush.

"Hasia, are you okay, Hasia?" I am gently nudging her. She opens her eyes slowly, with effort. "Who called this meeting?" Then she smiles, and I know that something is okay but I'm not sure what. "Wake me for supper," she says, and pulls the blanket over her head.



It's not easy to make it to supper. I start cooking, which is as good a way as any to pass the time. First I boil some eggs, then I boil some potatoes, then I boil a pot of water and wonder what to throw in. So I throw in onions, mushrooms, barley and call it soup. No salt, I remember, and throw in too much pepper.

When all that is going, I get to listening to music. "Songs of the Middle East" is what the announcer has said, and soon my body is making these funny movements like what I have seen in the Casbah at night. And in the middle of the trickiest turn of belly and hips, just as the left pelvis becomes perpendicular to the right pelvis, suddenly I am disappointed to hear the 6-beep news come on. My lower torso is still turning, while I listen to the announcer treating her wars and strikes with equal diction, until my attention is riveted by the words "bank robbery" —

"... In broad daylight, two young women, armed with .22 caliber pistols ... apparent professionals ... knocked unconscious a security guard (the dork must have fainted!) ... getaway in a white Mercedes ... city-wide net ... absconded with close to \$100,000 ..." Sheesh! All that ballyhoo! I had forgotten about the commotion we would be causing on the media and the like. Hasia! Too bad she's sleeping. How she'd love to hear the respect they treat us with. Professionals! We have to watch this on the tv news tonight. Hasia! No need to wake her up for this now. Though she'd surely love to hear this evaluation of her professionalism. Hasia! Oh, why don't you wake up already, Hasia! Tell you the truth, it's getting around supertime, if you're not particular

about waiting for sunset.

"Hasia," I whisper softly into the layer of blankets covering her head. "Hasia, it's almost time to get up." I can feel her stir underneath the mound of quilt. "Hasia, honey, time to see the world. Time to count your blessings. Time to listen to how the whole world is singing about those two brave women who took on the banking establishment and won."

Hasia puts her hand out to pull down the blanket. That's when I see how wrinkled it looks. Is this Hasia's hand? For a moment I believe that I have awakened the wrong person. A quick panicky thought! But then the blanket comes down and I can see Hasia's bun and its familiar brown barrette. Relief! Only thing is — Hasia's hair is brown, not white. It's then that Hasia turns toward me and I am confronted with Hasia's mother, maybe, or her grandmother, more likely. The beautiful Hasia, her face lines deep and definite, her cheeks now soft and tender.

"Ohhhh," I say, drawing my breath in sharply. "Oh, jimminy, are you alright?"

"Well," says Hasia, also noticing her new hand, thin and veiny. She studies it carefully. "Is that what the rest of me looks like?"

"About the same," I say. "Wanna mirror?"

She holds the mirror far from her face, to help her eyes focus better.

"Are you okay, Hasia?" I ask again. "What's this all about?"

"The magic hormone pills, Ella, the pills are over." Her voice is thin but strong. "This morning I threw them away. To test life without it. To test myself without it. To test you without it. Well, how does it feel?"

"Uh, well, you look so different, but nice, yes, definitely nice, Hasia, just so different. I gotta think, gotta get used to this, I need some time to sort it out. Maybe just a walk — I'll be back later, Hasia." And I escape into the late afternoon air.



It's late when I come back. I knock quietly on the door and wait a long time for Hasia to open it. When there's no answer, I push it open and let myself in, locking the door behind me. I don't turn on the light, but the moon is pouring into the window and my eyes are used to the dark. I walk over to the bedroom and listen to Hasia's soft sleep-time breathing.

I'm mighty hungry by then. I take the cold pot of soup and ladle some of it into my mouth. Half comes slithering down my shirt. When I have satisfied some of the loud stomach groaning, I

slump down into the over-stuffed chair and put my feet up. I'm tired. Had a long day today. Had some diarrhea, went shopping, robbed a bank, got on the radio, took a long walk. No wonder I'm bushed. Hasia had the right idea, going to bed early. Sounds damn tempting, I am thinking. The more I think about it, the more I am tempted. Such a long ride home. Hate to waste the shekel on the bus. Save me a trip back in the morning. And, mmmmm, Hasia's toasty warm bum. Gets my imagination crackling.

"Move over, honey," I say into the top of the quilt, "I'm back."

"Turn off the front light?"

"Done."

"Lock the door?"

"Done."

"Put the soup away?"

"Ate it."

"Oh," says Hasia, "no wonder your shirt is wet. Take it right off if you intend to stay in this bed."

So I do. She turns her whole body to mine and I feel her warmth against my skin and inside my strong sinewy arms. Mmmmm, this feels like home. I burrow my head down and find a soft place to lay it. Mmmmm.

"Tomorrow we'll visit the gyno clinic and do a feasibility study," says Hasia. "General arms control — specularia, stirrups, forceps, IUD's, hormones — destroy or booby-trap them. Perhaps a small incendiary device when no one is around. We'll check out all the options."

"Mmmmmm."

"You sure you're up to this, Ella?"

"Mmmmm, in the morning."

She's quiet for a minute, but then I feel her soft skin warming.

"Don't forget I'm not your mother and not your sister."

"Mmmmmm."

"More like friends, I would say."

"Mmmmmm. More like that, yes. Friends, Hasia."

It's mighty soft where our new friendship begins to grow. And the big moon purring against the window and trying to get in. I can feel the dark getting stretched into a long, long night. I wrap myself inside it and nestle, softly, in.

Hospital Poems

for V.B.

Visiting Hours

Sometimes when we came we tried to be straight
Miss Ray the last queen assorted butches
a room full of queers hightops and flat tops jean jackets
and t-shirts
we stood out funny the nurses stared
the walls were covered in greeting cards but
we were not a Hallmark family
flowers
paper hats
plastic leis
Groucho noses
I made you laugh
too hard it hurt
In the car that I borrowed from Susan, I
locked the doors against the rain the dark the parking lot
doubled over and
I couldn't
cry

101 To San Mateo

Late night on the freeways I sang to myself
in the borrowed cars with
AM only Johnny Cash, Muzak or driving off the road
Miles and miles a bridge three exits
I drove alone watching strings of light reflect and flash
water on the road, the water on my face

Bodily Functions

more intimate than lovers
they touched your body with cold metal and straps
I covered you with aloe
trying to make what they made meat
warm flesh
holding your breasts in my slippery hands
it was not erotic

I wanted you back
we looked for a nurse who knew how
to do your hair

"Girl — Vaseline'll take care of that ash."

I missed you

If Not Now When?

"You can't let yourself get so upset about this/I think you should
think about moving/ you have to get some distance from
the situation ...

said my straight friends to me. Because they were straight?

Because they were my friends?

You didn't count as real, I guess

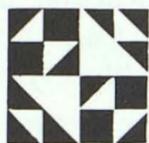
housemate friend my colored sister in our political theories but
not real

It's not as if we were lovers, after all

After Surgery/Epilepsy Poem #430

The night the late shift nurse shone her light into your
too responsive eyes
was like too many others
all Vikki and I wanted was a pizza a movie a break
from urine ammonia florescent hospital smells
We dived for her
too late

watched your body seize into inexorable convulsions
grim mockery of sex
Bandages crumpled your fragile spine
Eyes rolled up you
went somewhere else medics
came running with needles and drugs
you came and went like a drowning woman
Can you hear us Do you remember what just happened Can
you hear us
Can you hear us
The fifth time you stayed
"They didn't write it on her chart" still echoes in my ears



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Pamela Gray

excerpts from A Sacred Time: Journal Entries

Thursday, 1/7/88 11:15pm

Our breakfast together felt so much like old times that it was shocking to hear her talk about having 3-5 months left or less ("A hundred days"), about "uncontrollable cancer." I'm still in such denial.

Wednesday, 2/3 2:15pm

I've decided to write something about Barbara in here every day between now and the time she dies. I just stepped out of the shower and realized I need to do this — at least as a way to commit to staying in touch with my feelings during this time.

Barbara said a few weeks ago that she felt as if she were entering a sacred time, a holy time. Perhaps my decision to write about her during these final weeks (days?) speaks to my sense that I too am entering a different type of consciousness. I will function in the world, in my daily life as I always do, but underneath, in a deep part of me, my cells know that I am losing a dear friend, that someone I love is dying and leaving my life. My life? Her life. My life. Life.

In spite of the obvious physical deterioration she's undergone, what was most striking was the incredible state of acceptance and serenity she's in. She's ready to die. She's let go of most of the things she might have regretted at one point. Her one remaining regret is that she let sexual passion take her off her path, lead her away from the individual work she needed to do in her life. And I think that even though I keep telling her how blessed she is that she found herself as a writer, and that she's been so incredibly prolific in the past three years, she still feels regret that she didn't know earlier that one could just write from the heart, "not just as a sociologist."

She's been studying Torah with the Rabbi at Sha'ar Zahav, and told me about some of their discussions — the different interpretations of Jonah and the whale, the decision between cremation and burial. I sat there trying to detach myself from the full

impact of what she was saying, and felt at one point like I just wanted to sink into the soft gray leather couch and never leave. I felt myself wishing that Barbara would always be there, beside me, talking and laughing, gossiping and analyzing, schmoozing and kibbitzing.

Friday, 2/5 11:43pm

I called Barbara this morning and felt such relief to hear her sounding like her “old self,” saying she was doing good, writing one of the letters to Asher when I called. We talked about some of the things she’s been writing about — types of love, the difference between playfulness and humor — and once again I felt pulled into that strange pocket where Barbara is still Barbara and her cancer and imminent death are just a bad dream. It’s like being sucked into this illusionary feeling of relief — oh, she’s still *there*, it’s not true — only to come out again on the other side of remembering it *is* true.

Sunday, 2/7 10:48am

I called Barbara to find out about visiting her Tuesday and Sandy picked up the phone as I was leaving my message. “The situation has changed,” she said, “Barbara is too weak for visitors...” My heart clenched like a fist; she said she does need people to stay with Barbara while she goes out, so I’m going over there Tuesday for an hour. I asked if I could bring some food and she said, “Barbara doesn’t eat anymore.” At all? “Just a little custard, pudding ...” I felt myself getting shaky and weak. “Your visit with her was too long, it really wiped her out. You are — and this is a rare compliment — one of the most stimulating people in her life. She laughs, her mind works too quickly — she needs calm and quiet ... I don’t mean this as a criticism ...”

I stare at the calendar thinking which day? Which is the day when Barbara will die, a day that will pain me for the rest of my life?

I feel so bonded to her now, so much love for her. I don’t want her to leave. I don’t want it to be true.

And there’s another part, realizing that her own body is pushing her out, pushing her spirit to leave, and I want her to have that freedom, want the pain to be over for her.

I've been trying to write a poem about the iris bulbs she gave me when K. and I moved into the house, and how they didn't bloom until we were breaking up ...

Monday, 2/8 3pm

I feel like the earth's going to open up and I'll fall in at any moment. But no, it's not me falling in, it's Barbara and it hurts so much, my heart is breaking.

Connie talked about that "funny thing your mind does" when you're just wanting it to be over with, wanting the call already — but really, you *don't*, and you find that out as soon as the real call comes. Yes. I want to stop feeling like I'm on the edge of a cliff, but every minute Barbara is still here is better than any minute without her.

I'm cooking chick peas to make hummus for Barbara and Sandy, even though Sandy didn't want me to bring anything. It reminds me of how I felt this urge to feed Andrea the day before she went into labor, as if I wanted my nurturance, in the form of mushroom-barley soup, to be inside her when she went through that experience.

I'm afraid tomorrow will be my last time seeing Barbara.

Wednesday, 2/10 5pm

Barbara was in bed when I got there, looking pretty weak and frail. Big green oxygen tanks in the hallway, which Sandy showed me how to operate if she needed it. (She didn't.)

I walked beside an unsteady Barbara as she went into the kitchen and fed her my rice pudding, which she mixed with Ben & Jerry's chocolate ice cream. She couldn't eat anything with a sharp taste, but Sandy was happy I brought the hummus.

"She's becoming less and less Barbara." That's what Sandy said to me after, and those words have been haunting me. I saw what she meant. Barbara seemed drugged, a little out of it, although she talked quite lucidly for most of the time. There was a labored quality to her speech; talking was an effort. She stopped eating rather abruptly, and then lay on the couch where she spoke about "being in a decline," and how scary that was.

She said the most important thing for her right now was staying comfortable — and that took precedence over the writing.

I gave her my sonnet; she read it and a smile came over her; I put my arm around her and she kissed me. "That's nice," she said. "Periwinkle," she said, referring to the color of the iris I described. I had a strange sensation of her simultaneously having taken it in, and having feelings about it, yet also the opposite — letting it flow through her without really feeling much. That was O.K. with me — what was important was giving it to her. She had said earlier that she wasn't feeling any strong emotions at this point, some sadness about remaining goodbyes to be said, but she was through, didn't want to see people, or talk on the phone. "I said my good-byes already, I'm done. If people have things they want to say to me, they can send me a card."

Yet when I put her back into bed, she took the poem with her and propped it up next to her lamp, "to have it near me." There was something so poignant and child-like about her yesterday, her asking Sandy to bring her a cappuccino or latte — "I would like that very much" — her vulnerability as she got into bed with her T.V. changer — "I watch only the beginnings of things; I like Disney cartoons" — drinking water from a baby bottle. A baby, a child, a woman, an old woman all at once.

Sandy told me there's going to be a funeral and a memorial service, the latter to help those of us who wouldn't be comforted by a traditional funeral. The Rabbi won't let Barbara's ashes be in the temple but he'll officiate at the service. And the ashes? "In the garden," Sandy said. "The one piece of the planet that was hers."

February 14 10pm Valentine's Day

Barbara died at noon today. Linda called at 7, just as I finished meditating. "I have some sad news..." In spite of all the preparation, I felt shocked and disbelieving. It's so inconceivable that she's no longer here. Someone who was here isn't here anymore. Linda stressed that Barbara was ready, that it was very peaceful, that "she just drifted off," that Sandy, her sister Ruthie, her close friend Stanley were all by her bedside. She said she saw her last night and it was clear she was ready.

Funeral Tuesday, memorial service Sunday, shiva in between.

When I got off the phone with Linda I started sobbing and then the asthma came full force, a punch in my chest, burning blows, then wheezing, gasping for breath. Asthma spray, grief,

shock, lack of eating. I've been in an altered state all night. Making phone calls to change my plans for tomorrow, to arrange to have Andrew picked up at pre-school so I don't have to rush back from the funeral — but my speech felt thick and slurred, like I was drunk.

Monday, 2/15 12:50pm

Sobbing in the shower, feeling like Glenn Close in *The Big Chill*. Have I just seen too many movies or did that film capture a truth about showers being a place where we feel grief? The safety of the water beating down — sobs echoing in the wet enclosed space — the feel of water pouring over your naked body as the tears flow.

What I'm grateful for:

I told her I loved her

I said goodbye

Tuesday, 2/16 12:40pm

I feel like a grown-up in this dress and heels, an uncomfortable one at that — pantyhose hopelessly too small, not used to walking in these shoes. I miss my mother. I've never been to a funeral without her; this is the first time someone who's a part of only my life, not my family's, has died.

9:45pm

"She loved you very much. You knew how to play with her the best. You knew better than anyone how to meet her in that place."

Those were Sandy's words to me as we hugged in Sinai Memorial Chapel. I'm sitting over the edge of my grief, my feet dangling, trying not to fall into it because I need a rest.

Thursday, 2/18 2:38am

The moon tonight was a thin Cheshire cat's smile. It made me think of Barbara's wonderful smile.

Monday 2/22 4:43pm

The Memorial Service yesterday was so beautiful and so sad. I was an usher, so I gave *yahrzeit* candles to everyone, and these beautiful cards that had in them the last line of Barbara's last letter

to us: ... *It was a good life, it was a wonderful life and each of you who reads this is a part of the fabric that made it wonderful, whole and meaningful. I go in peace and calm. I shall miss you.* I read it and felt something grabbing at my heart.

I liked being an usher, seeing the face of each person who walked in, reading their names as they signed the guest book, finally seeing many of the people Barbara had talked about. I also helped a little in the kitchen, when Leigh and Gail were setting up the food — tons of delicious Jewish cakes and rugalach.

When it was time for Vermont College people to speak, I went up with Leigh, Susan and Rochelle. I can't believe I was standing there afraid that I didn't have a right to be up there. Barbara didn't ask me to be up there, my name wasn't on the list, it was self-indulgent to read my poem, etc., etc. But another voice — Barbara's? — was telling me that it was an honor to be up there and I deserved it. So I went up to the podium, shaking, and said "Barbara was my boss. And she was my friend. Writing was a big part of our relationship, and I was blessed to see different pieces of Barbara's writing in their various drafts. I wrote Barbara a goodbye poem and gave it to her a couple of weeks ago, the last time I saw her. I'd like to read it."

Our *yahrzeit* candles were lit from Sandy's candle, and we had a minute to sit with the candle and silently say what we needed to say to Barbara, then each of us placed our candle on the ledges until the whole temple was flickering and glowing with our love for Barbara.

I went back to the house after — the last time the group of us would be there together — and looked at pictures in albums. I was just there, in that house with her, that sacred special 40 minutes together, the last 40 minutes. At one point I just wanted to weep, but it seemed like the time for that had passed somehow. Not really, of course, but people were more into reminiscing, laughing over Barbara stories, drinking the wonderful wine she and Sandy had picked out after they found out she was terminal. In one picture, right before her surgery, she's sitting naked in a chair, and I just couldn't believe, looking at her, that her breast, her one right breast was the reason for all this. It seemed incomprehensible.

Sunday, February 28 11:25am

Happy Birthday to Me.

In Redwood Park where the mist is rising off the picnic tables and the pear trees are dropping white blossoms and the birds are singing and the trees are dripping. Talked to Barbara as I drove here, told her I was still grieving and missing her but I've been out of touch. I know it's still there.

2/29

Dream: I'm with Barbara and she looks so good and has so much more energy than she did towards the end. I keep telling her this, and I think she's letting me know that she's still going to die. We're in her kitchen and I'm so happy to be telling her the things I didn't get to tell her. I have a sense of having so much time, there's no hurry, I'll be able to really say goodbye this time. I'm telling her about the journal project I'm working on, and then she has the typed pages in her hand and she's giving me feedback on them. I'm so happy to be with her again.

Monday, 2/29 5:30ish At Willow

I want to spend the last of the daylight outside, even though the chair is wet and air is cool.

I called Sandy today to see how she was. It was the first time I called the house since Barbara died. I felt scared. Didn't want to hear the new message with its striking absence of Barbara's name. Was afraid I'd accidentally slip and say something on the message to Barbara, or use the plural by mistake.

I remember the afternoon I visited her, first week of February, the day after my script got rejected. As I drove home toward the bridge, I had this overwhelming sense of my aliveness and possibilities, realizing that I was reacting to the rejection as if it were my last chance, when in fact, I had many more chances. Barbara was the one who was out of chances. I remember looking around and feeling gratitude for everything, realizing that even being able to see the afternoon traffic, the smoggy skyline, was a gift. I thought about the other gifts in my life: Andrew, my writing, the woods, my cats, my friends — it was one of those profound moments which came after being with Barbara, who was dying and about to lose all the gifts in her life.

I knew even then that it wouldn't be possible to always hold

on to that vision, that I'd slip back into the trivialities, the wasting of time, the focusing on negative energy, the narrow view of my life, my scarcity mentality. But what a gift I can give myself if I can return to that as often as possible, if that vision can be the one I keep aspiring to. I want to live my life in a way that honors Barbara's memory, that uses what I learned from her.

The moon just rose and the sky is still light. A chorus of crickets is singing, and birds are chirping in all directions. It's cold and my tush is wet.



Late Irises: A Goodbye Sonnet

for Barbara Rosenblum

The iris bulbs you gave me never bloomed that spring; I was sure I must have planted them upside down, and flowers were growing under the earth. Then suddenly one late August night, a periwinkle iris appeared in the moonlight and the blooming began. It was too late by then; I was leaving my lover and ached to gather the irises in my arms with my other belongings. How unfair it seemed that your gift to me, your flowers were blooming where I couldn't see them. But now, as your spirit struggles to free itself, it comforts me to know that in a garden in East Oakland, a part of you will continue to bloom and bloom.

Sandra Lambert

Lunar Eclipse, 1989

We've driven out onto a field in north Florida, pulling up to a clear view of the full moon, an hour or so high in the sky. On either side are the low silhouettes of young pines. Feral tells us a screech owl was among them just before we came. Other cars pull in and soon there are 10 of us, dykes laying on the ground, leaning on cars, walking around, and me sitting in my wheelchair. Carie comes over and rubs on my shoulders and neck. I whisper to her, "be easy, careful." The shadow begins to stretch over the moon.

We talk individually and in groups, catch up on our day. Conversations wander over and around each other and we murmur into the night of dreams and headaches. We tell old tales of marijuana and speed and beer, talk of the tips we'd made that day, the houses we'd cleaned, the patients on our wards, and oh, isn't the moon intense. Discussions of Mexican food and orgasms and fireflies somehow all fit together.

The smokers separate off, arrange themselves over the front of a 1972 Chevy Impala, its broad hood stretched wider and longer by the moonlight. Weed is on the roof her knees bent up, arms leaning over them, reaching out, relaxed. Lisa's half hitched up onto the front of the car, foot casual on the bumper, leg bent, elbow angled on its knee. The others lounge along the hood leaning into the windshield as if it were the softest of pillows. Their cigarettes glow in the steadily darkening moonlight. Carie is braiding my hair and then loosening it and then braiding it again. We tell the smokers how good they look.

Someone says, "Hey, next time we see this it will be 1996." I try to pull my thoughts forward. What will my life be like then? What do I want it to be? All that comes to mind is — will my shoulders still hurt? I don't say it aloud. I can't fit it in with talk of kids that will have left home, money that will be made, and the girlfriends who will still be together. Through the binoculars the shadowed half of the moon glows red.

I sit in one place and lesbians rearrange themselves around me, some laying on the ground, lovers kissing stretched out in the

space vacated by the smokers. Deb goes from group to group with scissors and bucket, collecting snips of hair. Lisa is behind me now and begins to massage my shoulders and back and head and then my face. For a moment I worry that her firmness will hurt, but it doesn't and I lean back into her hands. The moon is mostly in the Earth's shadow now. Bulging out the side, a sparkling sliver of light remains.

Someone sets fire to the hair and flames outline the bodies of women. Soon an acrid smell reaches past them over to where I'm sitting talking of writing and books as tears rise up inside. No moonlight remains other than the faint corona, a reddish halo giving depth and roundness to what usually seems flat. We are all silent, watching, until some speak of how early they have to get up, others of how hungry they are, and who wants to stop at the Waffle House by the freeway. We separate into our various cars and destinations. Weed, Carie and I share the front seat of the Impala and I think of trying to explain with words what unconditional touch means to me. Instead I put my arm around Carie and stretch out my fingers so they lay on Weed's shoulder as she drives. We head out towards the main road reviewing the Waffle House menu.

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Feral and Sandra, 1989
Beth Karbe



Judy, Lynda Lou and Marilyn, 1989

Beth Karbe

Judy, Lynda Lou and Marilyn have maintained a close and committed friendship with one another for fifteen years. In the '70s, they worked an organic watermelon farm together. They were straight back then and lived with men. But by 1980, all three of them had left the farm (*and the men*) and come out as lesbians. They all live in town now. There is still a deepening, unusually intimate friendship between them. They dream of returning to the land someday, this time with other lesbians.

Beth Karbe

for joan, in 1967

i once had a friend who drove a schoolbus for a living,
a woman well into her 40's who wore her hair bleached a
brassy red and tied back in a curly tail.
she wore eye makeup thick and heavy and white lipstick and
talked tough like new yorkers can talk tough and she smiled to
rock and folk and peace music in a way that others in their 40's
just didn't back then.
i once had a friend who saved my life, who drove that schoolbus
to my front door, every day of the last two years I endured
high school, stopping on the street in front of my house and
risking her job every time she did.
and she kept *on* doing it, driving that schoolbus right up to my
house and honking, at 7 in the morning,
honking so anyone could hear and see that schoolbus she
drove right up to my house.
i once had a friend who saved my life, that schoolbus waiting
for me at 7 o'clock and the brassy redheaded
tough-talkin' woman who drove it, waiting for me to come out
of my house, clutching books tight to my chest and the burden
of the day ahead. it was 7 o'clock
and the brassy redheaded tough-talkin' woman
talked softly to me, sitting in that big leather seat,
smiling to the radio, to the rock and folk and peace music
in a way that others in their 40's just didn't back then.
i once had a friend who saved my life, drove that schoolbus
right up to my house so i wouldn't have to wait on the corner
two blocks up, so i wouldn't have to wait on the corner with
a dozen or so other kids my age, wait for the schoolbus
among taunts and jeers and words like "queer" and "lezzie,"
clutching books tight to my chest and the burden of the day
ahead. that brassy redheaded tough-talkin' woman
drove that schoolbus and let *me* on before anyone else,
smiled at the radio and talked softly to me as i rode in the seat

just behind her, that seat made for two that nobody else would
occupy even after the bus filled up with kids standing in the aisle.
i once had a friend who saved my life, smiled at the radio and
talked softly to me as i rode in the seat just behind her,
who never said the words
"queer" or "lezzie" or let anyone else say them either.
in that seat just behind her, that seat made for two that nobody
else would occupy even after the bus filled up
with kids standing in the aisle,
i once had a friend.



dancing to the beat of a different drummer
birdelle (b.a. byrd)

Band Class Collaboration

She wets the reed.
I cover the holes.

Spit dribbles out
the silver-rimmed bell.

We are third clarinets
playing one instrument

(she blows,
I finger).

The director's eyes bulge;
he's a tall Don Knotts.

We are
goofing the music.

excerpts from *Harvest of Ghosts*

Dave

Up in Helen's room I walk around. There isn't anything to look at. Everything is square and white and clean.

She says, "Do you know Judo?"

"No," I say. I will never catch up.

Out of her closet Helen takes baggy white trousers and a jacket. I feel them and they are thick and soft.

"This is a ghee," she says. "Dad says it's part of our heritage."

I feel my face get red and shiny and like it is bigger than me. I can't make the picture go away: the shiny pink sash and the white dress sticking out around my knees, Mrs. Hawkins' voice going "gracefully, gracefully, girls" and then I am high in the cassuerina tree in my jeans and then I am the tree, my skin all scaly and brown. Afterwards my mother was late and I had to stand in the courtyard under the flame tree which had pink and white fluffy flowers and I wanted to kick it and kick it.

"My name is Jake," I say, "I am a marine."

Helen says, "My name is Dave. It's a code name. I am a spy."

She sticks out her hand and I shake it hard.

"Will you teach me Judo?"

"Stand over here."

I go to the foot of the bed. She does something with her hands and feet, slides one arm under my elbows and then I'm falling over on the bed but I hold onto her and pull her down too and then we are twisting and pushing and she gets her knee between my legs. I start pushing down while I hold her arms down with my hands. I just want to keep pushing, holding her leg tight with my knees, and she is pushing too. My heart is beating very slowly in my belly. Dave pulls her arms loose. She is pushing my shoulders away. Her other leg comes around on the side of my leg and then she is sitting on top of me, my leg between her legs and her hands on my shoulders and I can see the wind in her face like she is riding a horse in the desert. She is moving up and down

only it feels like water hitting the side of a boat and she is a sailor looking far away at the sky. I get slower and slower like a long wave pulling up and up and then it is the wind tangling in my chest and a scream starting in my belly and like a hand inside my body as big as my body clenching in a fist and I push her off of me. I have to lie there very still until I get back inside me.

Dave says, "That wasn't Judo, that was wrestling. In Judo you know what you are going to do. You learn different moves."

I think I'm going to cry. I look at her very seriously. I say, "What happened to you when you were born?" She looks in my eyes. "Who sat on your face?" I say. "Who made it flat?"

She is still looking at me. She doesn't smile. "Say that again," she says, "I'll sit on your face and I'll squash it good."

I look down. "Yeah," I say, "Yeah. Dave."

"Jake," she says.

Helen

Now I have to go my mother and my father and my brother and me we have to leave Nigeria and I have to leave Dave and I don't want to go but I know it's best because I'm scared you'll find out my lies and then you won't be my friend because I can't remember what stories I've said I can't remember if they contradict and if I can't keep the threads in my hand you will find one and pull like pulling a loose thread in the hem of a T-shirt and it will all unravel and then you won't be my friend Dave Helen because I have lied because I don't remember I can't remember what I said I don't remember what happened did I see a green mamba waiting in the bamboo did it look and look at me did I see a crocodile in the creek did I nearly drown did a snake come to live in my house did Christine ever take me in her room and tell me stories feed me fufu with her fingers did I save her when the soldiers came did I wade through the lagoon in the dark for help did I see a dead baby I don't remember the stories I told you I wish I remembered I remember the words coming out of my mouth and being surprised how right they sounded and how they wove together like a web, how they went round and round and stuck to each other and now I can't untangle them and I don't know what happened.

I remember the first day I came for lunch and your mother who is so small and like a bird and still remembers Korea made us rice and there was a big glass of milk. I took a mouthful and you made me laugh and I sprayed it all over the tablecloth. I wanted to crawl under the table. I remember us playing chinese chequers on the sofa when it rained and in the corner there was a blue bag of golf clubs and your father took Jerry in the study and beat him I don't remember what for but he did it every Friday and upstairs in your room there are dirty marks on the wall where we did push offs and we looked at pin ups we looked at them naked women because we were sailors and you were Dave and I was Jake and we inspected our belts of tools our penknives and flashlights that we wore when we were spies and sailors out in the yard by the paw-paw tree and on the street sometimes we teamed up against Jerry and Bill and we always won and Caroline never played because she is a good girl and now I'm going away and I have to be glad I'm going away because I told so many stories I can't remember what I said and you'll find out. It's better I go now. It's better I go now before you find out I lied.



Deerwoman
Terry Hauptman

Emily Levy

the revenge of chunky beef

Iknew my family would be having thanksgiving dinner without me again. they do it every year now, ever since i became a lesbian. and ever since i came out to my mother, six years ago today, and told her some things about lesbians that she didn't want to know, she's basted her turkey with a spoon.

as far as they know, i'm not celebrating thanksgiving. between my politics and my vegetarianism, it's not my favorite holiday. i've always made sure my family knows that. i'm the family trouble-maker, the one who always talks about my reasons for being a vegetarian when everyone else is eating steak and i'm cramming my mouth with mashed potatoes and no gravy. i used to think there might be hope for joanne, one of my little sisters, to reject that old american standard of animal genocide. but she took a lifelong vow of carnivorousness after she had the pleasure of seeing my parents' wrath leveled at me.

my folks think of me as stodgy, in a weird way. tease me about how predictable i am, and how they count on me to complain about every racist remark they make. and, yes, certainly i ask them why they bother making those remarks, if they know they're racist. that's exactly the kind of moment when my parents show off their uncanny ability to light cigarettes in unison.

i refuse to be entirely predictable, though. this year i'm *celebrating* thanksgiving. not in the traditional way, to be sure, but who knows? if my plans are successful, maybe this sort of celebration will become a tradition in my little subculture.

i have lit the candles on my altar. a yellow one for clarity, a lavender one to summon the supportive energies of my sisters, a black one for defiance, and a magenta for revenge. they sit on my altar surrounding my amethyst sphere, the stone i think of as representing my adult self which contains all of my child selves, as there are an infinite number of smaller spheres contained in every large one. the image of the sphere is an important one for me to keep with me today.

lil and rockwomon (keep your teeth in, it's a nickname) arrive with the costumes, and we have a fine time dressing up. rock-

womon is to be a clown, and we overdo the greasepaint smile on her to the point where we have very little room left on her face for the traditional red circles on the cheeks. lil is a witch, because we couldn't resist. pointy black hat, green rubber hands, stick-on wart, the works.

i am a can of campbell's soup. the real reason is that it's important to disguise my size and shape, but it could be said that i symbolize the children of america. in case you're interested, i am chunky beef. lil and rockwomb have practiced calling me "c.b." for a week, so they won't slip and call me carla. my answering machine is totally confused.

fifty balloons rest solidly on the ceiling, reminding us that we are celebrating. i've snuck one black one and one lavender in with the bunch of generic cheery brights. i have to have my symbols everywhere.

a xeroxed message dangles from the string of each balloon. i'm still uneasy about this part of the plan. what if the wind is so strong that the balloons land in a neighborhood where no one even *knows* my father? on the other hand, what if my mother's friends find them on their front lawns? is that *really* what i want? lil assures me that we can decide whether or not to release the balloons at the last minute.

it's time for a final runthrough. lil gives us the cue on her kazoo, and now that we are in costume we realize we've mixed our metaphors. if a kazoo is going to be played, it's the clown and not the witch who has to do it. out of team spirit rocky does not complain. still, i know she cringes every time anyone even *refers* to a kazoo as a musical instrument. rockwomon plays classical piano. (years ago, rachael refused the nickname "rachmaninov," not wanting to be named after a man. we joked about calling her "rock, womon of" instead. the name — and all its derivatives — stuck.)

the kazoo hurdle safely jumped, we find our performance is ready. rockwomon briefly complains that my nasal humming sounds more like creamed celery soup than chunky beef. what can i say?

i grab a sack of tofu jerky and a bottle of pomegranate juice and we pile into my toyota. lil has to drive because the bottom rim of my can gets hitched up around my waist when i sit, and there's no way i'll fit behind the wheel.

the holiday crowds have thinned; the clear roads tell us that everyone's in their houses eating, or watching football, or beating each other up. even the highway traffic isn't bad. we pass a cop with a guy trying to walk a straight line. i want to take a picture of him and send it to the newspaper. i get like this when i go to the suburbs.

lil, ever the amateur therapist, says i'm being cynical to cover up my fear, and that reminds me where we're going. okay, so maybe she's right. but if somewhere inside me there's anywhere as much fear as there is cynicism, it's a wonder i have any fingernails left at all. i prefer cynicism to fear, i prefer anger to fear, i prefer just about anything to fear. do you blame me? so far, i prefer revenge to fear. i wonder for a moment what the relationship is between cynicism and revenge, and make a mental note to think about it later.

lil slows down when i point out the house, but i urge her to keep going. i don't want my car to be recognized. we drive a couple blocks more, turn the corner, and park. my heart is pounding, "CHUNKy-beef, CHUNKy-beef, CHUNKy-beef."

"okay," i tell them, "our timing is perfect. i noticed the dining room light is on, so it's for sure they're eating." it's almost uncanny (pun intended) how well i know my mother and how distant i feel from her at the same time. as if keeping the light off in the dining room makes her annual holiday tablesetting a surprise. shit, i think, maybe unveiling the table that way is her only hope of getting any attention for all the work she does preparing, and i start remembering how she'd spend two days in the kitchen before a holiday like this ... the thought of her basting the turkey the old way, before she knew about donor insemination, brings me back out of my little fantasy. no time to feel sorry for her now. CHUNKy-beef, CHUNKy-beef.

"shit, we forgot the balloons!" i realize.

"you put them in the trunk," says rocky. "you okay, c.b.?"

lil reaches over and pats my hand, which i'm resting on the back of the front seat, between my two pals. "it's not too late to back out," she says.

somehow i find that ironic. three dykes in costume in the suburbs on turksgiving. haven't we already crossed the line? i shake my head.

"believe me, we've got you covered." lil shows me a small

package wrapped in heavy brown paper. "we're prepared for anything."

"what's that?"

"insurance," she says smugly, and tucks it back into her pocket.

"you two are the best," i say, "the absolute best. thanks." i pat lil's hand, and lean over to kiss rockwomon. i knock her in the ear with my top rim instead.

lil and rock help me climb out of the car. they manage to get the top of my can hitched up over my head and unroll the round piece of fabric that's to become my lid. i pull my arms inside my costume; lil velcros the armholes shut. i thank her again for this ingenious design. dykes are truly amazing.

rockwomon and lil have to lead me down the street, which is tricky since my love handles aren't available to hang onto. i can see through the fabric just fine in a lighted room because my face is positioned real close to the cloth. here, though, the street light doesn't suffice.

as we're walking up the block, witch and clown each with a bunch of balloons in one hand and the other on my can, i hope to hell the whole neighborhood is eating turkey right now. sorry, turkeys, but i feel entirely vulnerable. it's hard to believe that no one can see through my costume from the outside. it feels like anyone who looked could see all the way through to my brain, could know exactly what i have planned for the evening. like when i first thought i might be a lesbian and was sure everyone could tell by looking at me.

we make our way up the driveway. rockwomon informs me that another car has joined the line-up since we cruised by a little while ago. the navy fiat she describes belongs to my older brother jim and his pregnant spouse. late, as usual. jim and denise have the classic "strong, gentle man/frail, shy woman" relationship. lil hands the clown her balloons.

lil rings the bell. CHUNKy-beef, CHUNKy-beef, CHUNKy-beef. shit. am i really going to do this? someone turns on the porch and driveway lights. i want to hang on tight to my friends, but my hands can't reach much besides the pockets of my 501's. at least now i can see.

joanne answers the door. she's sixteen. told me last month that she mentally packs her suitcases for college every night before she falls asleep. she's a sweetheart, joanne. i wish she didn't have to be here to see this.

rocky and lil are on the ball. the minute the door opens, rockwomon says "a capella-gram," and lil puts her finger to her smiling lips, hushing joanne into complicity. it works. joanne stifles a giggle and leads us to the dining room.

the whole family looks up from their meal. dad faces us from the head of the table. he's clearly annoyed at what must certainly be a horde of filthy anarchists— who else would dare interrupt the sanctity of the holiday? mom's hostess smile is only a little more tentative than usual as she rises from her chair to greet whomever we might be. i can see jim trying not to look surprised as a witch, a clown, and a giant soup can interrupt his dinner. denise looks puzzled, probably wondering if this is yet another sims family tradition she's going to have to get used to. and kat, home from college, smiles broadly, ready to welcome this promise of gaiety into her already enchanted family.

rockwomon fishes the kazoo out of her down-sized pocket and toots. she and lil begin to sing. i hum along, careful to remember the nasal tone that's part of my disguise.

oh, give me a home
with a pushbutton phone
where neighbors and siblings all play
where seldom is heard
a discouraging word
because everyone's happy all day.

home, home with the range
where a turkey is cooking away
where you can be assured
we were sent by a bird
your thanksgiving feast to delay.

i take a breath between chorus and verse to look around. they're all smiling now. dad has pushed his chair back and folded his hands across his belly. his elbows rest on the arms of his chair. mom has turned her chair a bit so she has a better view. jim's trying to figure out who ordered this treat. no one is eating.

where the air is so pure
and the ladies demure
where faces are freckled and white
on this suburban street

secrets are not all sweet
we're here to uproot some tonight.

home, home can be strange
when families are not who they claim
the facade may be nice
but the kids pay the price
when they grow up with hearts full of shame.

i see confusion on their faces. i hear a little gasp, then a sniffle.
i feel tears running down the side of my nose. i must really be out
of my body; i had no idea that sniffle was me. i'm thankful to have
this soup can to hide in. somehow i manage to continue.

you can all be sure
that this literature
comes direct from your own dusty shelf
our song was composed
by whom you suppose
if she could, she would be here herself.

from home, she feels estranged
it's at dad we aim our exposé
martin sims, you have erred
your fate now is assured
your fish we're about to fillet.

the image makes me cringe. i swear i'm shaking. i can barely
hear rocky and lil. i feel like it's only me up here. my stomach is
churning. if i really were a can of soup, i'd have botulism by now
for sure.

somehow i manage to look out at them through both my
emotional haze and the muslin one. everyone's sitting up straight
now. only the sims' resident "cheshire kat" still smiles. could she
really think we're singing about fish fillets? maybe she could. dad
looks scared to death. i can see struggle on his face. should he take
this seriously? is he really in trouble? couldn't be. it's only some
silly women in costume. ha. he lights a cigarette. sure enough,
mom is lighting one, too. nothing to do but hum.

how often at night
did your morals take flight
and your toes tip to carla's bedside

your sexual assaults
were not carla's fault
and the truth she can no longer hide.

dad's out of his chair, starting towards us. shit. i knew i'd made the fucking song too long. now what do we do? i look over at rockwomon.

but it's lil who takes action first. suddenly she's cackling, raising her arms and pointing both green, knobby forefingers at dad. steam rises from her hips and nearly engulfs her face. "halt!" she screeches. everything freezes except kat's smile, which falls to the floor.

rockwomon begins to sing:

this home, home needs to change
a process we hope will ensue
we wish you no harm
as we sound this alarm
we'll leave now, without further ado.

rocky turns and heads for the door, pausing only long enough to let one balloon fly to the ceiling, its tag fluttering. lil grabs a handful of my costume and pulls me. i hear a rip. i don't care. we're smokin', headed for the door and out. "slam it!" i whisper, and lil obliges. i hear bits of dry ice fall from her pocket as she runs.

when we're halfway down the drive, i hear the door open. this is it. i know it. we're done for.

"wait!" we hear. there's no way in hell.

but lil stops and turns. i could kill her.

"it's joanne," she says.

joanne is pulling her coat on as she runs toward us. "i'm coming with you guys. wait, ok? you gotta let me!"

"i don't know ... " says rockwomon.

"you sure?" says lil. "how come?"

"you've gotta take me to carla," says joanne, who has caught up with us by now. "me and her have to talk."

rocky unleashes the balloons.

For Kimi

Our friendship has grown
into a delicate garden

Beginning with fragile recognition
we found each other
entering the same buildings
a mutual fascination
with the screaming eyes of children
and relentless mothers
ironing against our skins

And opening every window
we found balconies of poems
and mirrored boxes
wind up toys and visions of serenity
like Alaska

You used words
to make ceremony
sometimes to a sparrow
sometimes to the passionate run
of the salmon
I threaded a clothesline
of lost words
into gesture

Today we finish
the last load of laundry
picking the fox tails off
the wool blanket
And as you pack up
your hundreds of smock-like dresses
the elegant combs for your hair
I am already missing you

Will you sing to me
from a Colorado telephone?
Make me letters from under a tree?

I will keep your journals
safely beneath my bed
write you passages
with my morning tea
watch for your wings
on a sparrow

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Stones in Somerville

For Jeanne

Act I. Scene I:

You say, you know, the Irish
are being discriminated against, after
we walked past a younger-than-most
panhandler, possibly Irish.

I retort, he can get a job — he's young
enough. Besides, he's white
and male — privileged in most
societies, especially this one.

The "discrimination" against that man
with dull eyes and frayed edges has nothing
to do with the attacks I experience
and try to explain
to you and everyone else.

And when I tell you that hatred is alive
living in the infested gutters
and the white-washed driveways
of Boston, you look at me like
I am reciting a fairytale.

Act II. Scene I:

Then when I choke out
an incident
in the white neighborhood
of Somerville where I was
living: a group of white
male punks followed me
from the "T" stop

late one night when I was alone
as I was unlocking my bicycle,
they threw stones at me
laughing and shouting, "Hey chink!
Go back where you came from ... you oriental
bitch ... ha, ha!"

I feel the white, ignorant knife
of denial and expression of disbelief
on your neatly powdered face slice
into my heart and pride.

Because you have not been chased,
harassed, called ugly, hate-filled names,
I feel stones,
stones, boulders
of misunderstanding,
invalidation bruise
the truth,
the reality of my experience
not all fairytales end happily.

Act I. Scene II:

An open wound
eventually heals
but a deeply imbedded scar remains
in re-opening the wound,
I see you differently, changed —
the warmth from your privileged,
not so neatly powdered face
turns cold,
hard, and oh so white
features reflect the ignorance,
your refusal to see my pain
shifts into a familiar place
of former friendships, lost

Act II. Scene II:

connections
to your own racism
a refusal to acknowledge
your discrimination
your stone throwing
and I know.



self-portrait
Anne Mi Ok Bruining

Cath Thompson

Recently, It Has Occurred to Me

We are friends.
I talk to you,
I listen to you,
I cook for you,
I play backgammon with you,
I read your books and loan you mine,
I wish for you a more satisfying life.
These are acts of friendship.
You accept them without question.

When we talk,
we talk of our lives,
of what we like
or don't like.
Of what we would change
and why.
We talk of work and play,
friends and enemies,
lovers and sex.

When we talk,
you talk about past lovers
and your anger at your father.
You talk about why you decided
SM wasn't good for you.
You talk about your attraction to a friend,
and how hard it is to approach her.
You talk about your fear of pursuing
and your distaste for being pursued.
You talk about eschewing romantic love,
and how, for you,
sex is super-glue.

When we talk,
I talk about being discounted
never considered a potential lover,
being taken for granted as a friend,
because I am fat.

I talk about how many of my friends
assume I will be grateful for their friendship.
I talk about pretending that I have no needs,
so that my friends will not feel burdened.
I talk about my fear of having a lover
because I can never know that she
truly likes my fat body.

When we talk,
once I tell you I love you.
once you tell me I am important to you.

These are all acts of friendship.
But,
recently, it has occurred to me
that I may not know what friendship is.
I have noticed something:

You say you are interested in seeing a movie.
I say I am too.
Would you like to go?
You become vague about your schedule.
A week later, you mention you saw the movie
with another friend.
I say I would like to go out to dinner this weekend.
Would you like to go with me?
You tell me I should know you can't plan
three days in advance.
Then a mutual friend says you and she went to dinner
last weekend.
I call you up and say it's a beautiful day.
Come to the park with me for an hour or so.
You tell me you have to go running.

Recently, it has occurred to me
that I am not someone to be seen with
in public.
Recently, it has occurred to me
maybe
we are not friends.

Friends, Lovers and Passion

Last night I hung out at an old lover's house all evening, eating pizza, telling stories, laughing, listening to the thunderstorm. Adrienne and I ended up telling her new housemate about our relationship, one story leading to another, stories interrupted by the dog, the cat, the phone, until we had told her the whole thing. We smiled and laughed at the familiar events: our three day affair at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival; travelling the four hours between Ann Arbor and Cleveland to see each other; what happened when her other lover returned from a year in Israel; my move to Ann Arbor a year later. But I had trouble ending the string of stories. The problem is we haven't broken up but are no longer lovers, and I didn't quite know how to explain that.

The not breaking up part is clear enough; we just didn't. We didn't stop talking to each other; we didn't fight; we didn't stop touching, hugging, holding each other. What we did do was take a walk one day and realize we weren't lovers anymore. But not being lovers is more vague. I still hang out, take walks, have dinner, go to Pickerel Lake with her. I have a key to her house as a matter-of-course. We hold hands as often as not; we sometimes kiss; occasionally we've slept in the same bed. And yet we're not lovers. Part of it is about passion, the passion that had us scheming for rides between Cleveland and Ann Arbor, had us talking on the phone once or twice a week when I lived at the Women's Peace Camp, had us making love quietly in an empty room at the DC youth hostel after the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. That kind of passion is gone.

But when I think of passion, I also think of women who I call friends, women who are clearly not lovers. I think of Sarra. She and I have spent hours working over my poetry, her songs, working until we know the line breaks and near rhymes so well and the images begin to come clean. Marjorie has met my family, stayed in the house I grew up in, walked the beaches I call home: Battle Rock, Cape Blanco, Humbug, Paradise Point. We talk about politics and oppression, talk about being a Jewish dyke and

disabled dyke, about how to be allies. I think of Susan and a night I came home from my incest survivors support group. It had been a hard evening, lots of tears, and we sat in the kitchen talking and eating popcorn. Finally when I was ready to go to sleep, she asked, "Can I come tuck you into bed?" Annette writes long wonderful letters and still calls me "tentmate." We shared a North Face dome across the country on a peace walk three years ago, spent many nights laughing each other to sleep. One summer Mary and I lived together in Oakland. We would walk around Lake Merritt at night, and she would recite "Alice's Restaurant." Afterwards we would steal peaches from the tree down the street, sit on our front steps, and eat them. I have a kind of passion with each of these women, not a sexual passion, but something that sustains us.

And there's more about passion that's not just about individual women. Last winter a friend died in a plane crash on her way back from London. I met Liz on the Great Peace March; we were both part of the Wimmin's Collective, a group of women on the Walk who camped together, sat in circles through full moon rituals and meetings, talked and talked through the miles from LA to DC. Each night as we burned candles over journals, books, Tarot cards, hours of conversation, our tents would glow, a circle of translucent domes. And then at 6 am, I would listen as we woke up, tents unzipping, "good mornings" spoken across the circle.

When Liz died, we crisscrossed the country by phone: from New York to Ann Arbor to Phoenix to Santa Cruz and back again. We called to cry and laugh, to make our connections conscious again. Through all the calls, I wanted to see these women, to hold them as if to ward off another death, to fill the space between the plane crash and the last time I saw Liz. And so after days on the phone, we gathered in LA, to tell old stories, new stories, talk about Liz, to hold each other through the memorial service: how I moved from Judith to Cheryl to Tracy, looking up to see Annette and Sarah holding each other, Marjorie behind me, arms around my waist. The next day as we played at the Santa Monica Pier, took long walks, thumbed through old photos of Liz, we held each other tighter. This passion feels inexplicable.

It makes me remember that what separates my lover relationship of a year ago from my friendship today with Adrienne is not

as simple as passion or lack of passion. Nor is it as simple as sex. I never even kissed the woman who I call my first lover, and yet we were lovers for awhile. I have the love poem she wrote me just before I left still tacked to my bedroom wall: "I hum corny songs/you know the kind/then become a Black Fred/or Ginger/leaping across a stage somewhere/you in my arms of course." The differences between friends and lovers are about many kinds of passion: passion like steady rain day after day until the trees, sky, hills, even the light, are saturated with water; like Midwest thunder storms, rain hard and fast, rain that washes the humidity away, leaves the air sharp; like drops barely drops but fog spreading up a river valley at dusk.

But these words, the words for passion and the ways it enters many different relationships, don't even exist. Several months ago I needed to go to Toronto to support Sarra through some difficult medical testing. At that time I worked in City Hall, and my sick leave policy stated that an employee could use sick leave time in case of medical emergencies for immediate family. For lack of more accurate words, Sarra is immediate family to me in ways my biological family will never be. We've lived together, moved together, shared our money, travelled together, been allies for each other, talked about what we want when we die. And yet when I went to my boss to claim my sick time, I was stuck without words, told him my sister was sick, only to find that sisters don't even count as immediate family. They mean husband, wife, biological children, father, mother.

That day I simply didn't have words to explain partly because of heterosexism, partly because they simply don't exist. Lover implies sex and romantic entanglement, partner implies lover, friend implies a casualness and a lack of passion. There is a gap here, the distance between lover and friend, and I want to fill that gap with a language that sustains me as richly as all my relationships sustain me.

Plain Geometry

On the granite cliffs at Otter's Point
Nikon field glasses hung on your neck
As we stepped over rock solids
Gazed into many-sided tidal pools.
All day, small shapes held your attention:
 the diagonal of a leaf
 the arced tip of a butterfly's wing
 the winged triangles that disappeared into thick Maine green
 wild flowers in pyramids of color
 the intermittent line of a bird's call
 the angle of my wrist as you held it, suddenly.

Night gave us a circumference of darkness
Attended by hovering moths, khaki bodies falling on our
 perimeters
 and the red star Antares in my sign of Scorpio.

Looking up into a semi-obscurd late July sky
I saw three stars

That's the Summer Triangle you said
and then: *How good you are at spotting shapes*

In the cool silent night

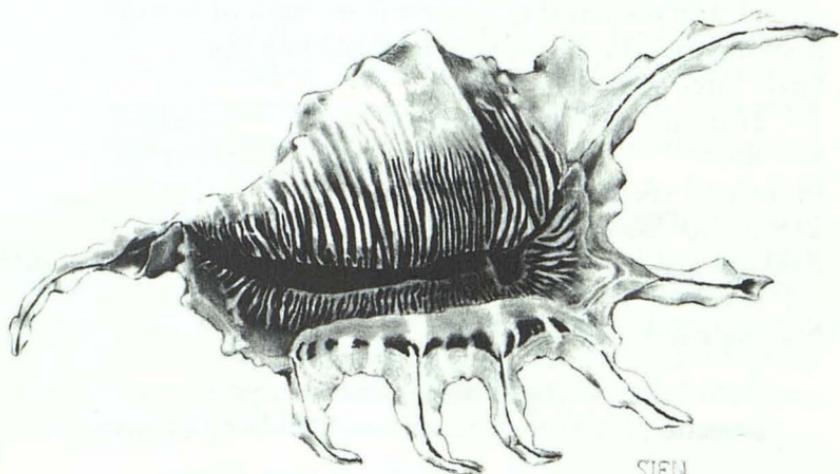
You do not know — I have seen this shape before
And not just in faraway objects sprinkling a midsummer night
 sky —

My angle of vision is clear:

 Your lover visiting friends on the Cape
 Bisecting the space between us with her distance

I do not tell you that I learned this in high school,
This subject in which we will test each other.
As women, notoriously deficient in math,
I can not count on us
To recognize the wrong answers.

Under a half-moon haze-glowing
Your shape and mine
Two fallen bodies
Beneath three stars
Of a summer triangle.



Spider Conch
Bettianne Shoney Sien

Friendly Definitions

They say once a relationship is defined
it cannot venture into realms unknown.

But what about you dozing here beside me,
grains of sand like powdery silk between our toes,
crowding your horizontal mass beneath a too small
terrycloth blanket?

You quietly ooze into unconsciousness
as we celebrate a shared decade
of observation.

But does our connection change
as I watch you leave me
dreaming of others?

Strange men,
old grandmothers call us
sisters.

"Family," they say, "is a different kind of love
from that of lovers
or mere friends."

But there is no word,
no phraseology,
no all-encompassing term
that describes us or
our much-connected hearts.
Beating strong, warm, sure, there:
a love of knowing and being,
with our own definition of
us.

Penelope J. Engelbrecht

Never Jerk Your Hand Away

Szzwtt ... She flicked down the radio volume as she pulled into the gravel parking lot, spraying dust behind the heavy car. Couldn't stand the blast of instant noise when she started 'er up again at 3. Hard to believe, only 6:55 in the morning, and already 84 fucking degrees out. Humidity must be 100%. She wondered why the air wasn't just water, if it was a hundred percent.

The thought disappeared as she went in the door by the loading dock, as the cool, conditioned air oozed out past her. Glanced at her watch and slowed down a bit. Punched in at the time clock by the office entry, and then headed for the long table in the middle of the bindery area. Half a dozen heads, most greying, cranked around at her approach — the machines were still quiet. Various "hey"s and "g' morning"s greeted her as she slipped a quarter in the slot and took the first heady slug of the day's first Coke.

"Gonna rot cher gut with that crap, Marian," said one of the tightly curled grey perms, without even turning around to look at her drinking.

"Yeah, like drinking two gallons of coffee a day would do me better, hey?" She laughed as the blasted buzzer came on. Nobody moved.

"Let's go, girls," Judith sighed as she pushed back her folding chair and started for her little desk at the intersection of the bindery and the shipping department.

Marian took another drink of Coke and lit a Marlboro as she headed for her collator. Three years of BS from the foreman, who was basically a nice guy even if incredibly sexist, and finally she'd gotten out of the bindery, away from the shit work. Her prestige went up (if there was any to be had at Riverfront Forms), and the pay had about doubled. Course, she still made less per hour than all but the newest guy working the collators, but she made more than almost all the women, possibly excepting Judith and Felice, who'd started at Riverfront the day god made the earth, the same day the plant opened.

When the buzzer died out, the music kicked in from Al's ghetto blaster, on his workbench behind hers. Marian rolled up

her sleeves and inspected the day's work orders. She dropped the cigarette in the ashtray on her bench and turned to the spindles at the back of the machine to see what sort of mess Jimmy had left her this morning. Just 'cause he was the manager's son, he thought he owned the place.

Turkey shouldn't be able to get his hands on any collator more complicated than a bottle of Elmer's Glue, she thought as she flicked on the power switches. The steady hum of the moving belts was interrupted by the faint strains of Felice whistling — today, "Rum and CocaCola." Up on the running platform, Marian leaned around the head of the machine to grin at her catcher. The stocky older woman had already made a couple of dozen boxes and stacked them neatly at the end of the table off the delivery.

"Bout ready to roll?" Felice hated downtime.

"Yeah, just a sec," as she adjusted the perforation blades on the big rotating cylindrical head. "OK, let's do it," Marian said as the rolls at the rear of the collator started turning and an accordion of crisply folded, continuous forms began marching down the conveyor belt to Felice, who expertly monitored the counter, ripped, and swept each pile into a waiting cardboard box. She plopped boxes into a row on the back of the skid behind her and didn't even seem hurried.

"Should I crank 'er up a little bit, Felice?" Marian hollered over the mechanical clamor in the plant. She knew that Felice would nod: she worked so hard, sometimes Marian — thirty years her junior — got tired just watching.

"Marian, it's not gluing between parts three and four," Felice yelled.

"OK." She stepped to the glue mechanism. A quick appraisal told her that Jimmy had done it — or NOT done it — again. "Gotta shut down and fill the darn thing," she told Felice as she hit the red stop button at her left.

Felice shook her head and spotted Evelyn, heading out from the office for the coffee maker. Felice ambled that way with her 2 pint mug, and picked up a chocolate frosted donut as Evelyn lifted the spigot handle. "How are ya today, Evvie," she asked.

Evelyn sighed and waved her hand. "Oh, you know, same old thing. John is at it again, got all the orders mixed for billing, everything's late, the government's breathing down our necks for that 3 million batch for the Navy — you know, the usual baloney." Evelyn took a sip of coffee before returning to the office.

"Say, there's going to be a new girl in the bindery for a while, starting today at 9, just to get that Navy order out. Give her a hand if you can, Felice."

"Sure thing," Felice said brightly as she rejoined Marian at the collator. She was always friendly and gave good advice to the new girls; what with all her years of experience, she could afford to, avoiding the petty rivalries of the younger, less-secure women.

Marian had stopped the collator to change over empty rolls on one and four when Felice spied the new girl being introduced to Judith by John, ever oily and self-important. She squinted over her half-lens glasses at the darkskinned young woman, little taller than herself, and began to shake her head.

"Whatsa matter, Felice?" Marian asked as she idled up past the workbench for a Marlboro. "Oh. Looks like another slave for the fires, eh? You suppose she's one of those Indian refugees we heard about? Gotta heck of a suntan, being as it's only June."

"Watch your mouth, Marian."

"Well, pardon me."

"Maybe. Evelyn told me to show her the ropes; she's going to work on that Navy mess."

"Guess that means she'll have to learn how ta run the single-folder, huh, Felice?"

"I'd say so," the woman replied. "Think she'll be able to lift the rolls?"

Marian eyeballed the newcomer a little more critically. "Well, she's kinda skinny, but she's got pretty wide shoulders — she'll probably do OK if Harry leaves her alone to do it. He always tried to make me chase down Al to do it for me when I had that schtick." Felice nodded thoughtfully as Marian continued, "Her clothes look sorta shabby, hey? At least she's not wearin' one of those Indian 'sairie' things. Don't think that'd work out for long! Probably only started her at three fifty, too. Damn shame John's such a penny-pincher."

"Yeah, he sure is," Felice said, still watching as Judith led the new woman over to the one idle singlefold machine and began to show her the operation. "Sure is ..."

When the buzzer rang for lunch, Marian and Felice had already run and boxed 62,000 forms, even though Marian spent a good deal of the time standing on the platform and staring past the foreman's cubicle at the single-folder area. When the new woman noticed everyone heading for the fridge and the work-

table-soon-to-be-a-lunchtable, she walked quickly to Judith's desk, spoke to her for a moment, then turned and headed for the loading dock door. "Don't forget, back to work at 12:30," Judith yelled after her. Marian saw her smile shyly as she responded with a nod. But amid the lunchtime gab, she almost forgot the woman's face. The old ladies went quickly into a rabid consideration of the Catholic Church program for refugees, the presumed difficulties this would cause in their cozy Midwestern community, and managed to pass along a hoard of misinformation before anyone even remembered to ask Judith what the new one's name was.

"Zha something or other."

"Looks like a nice girl to me," Felice said, "at any rate."

"Yeah," everyone agreed. Indeed, thought Marian to herself; yes indeed.

When the buzzer sounded for back to work, Marian noticed that Zha had already started up her machine and was clumsily boxing the large green-printed forms as they flowed off the end of the delivery. Gotta clue her in on that workaholic stuff, Marian decided as she started up the collator.

The afternoon was a hell of clogged glue lines, blunt perf blades, and poor press runs that wouldn't match up with the other three parts into even forms, so Marian hardly had a chance to appraise Zha to her satisfaction. She was smoking the last Marlboro in her pack, bullshitting with the guys in the punch-clock line when the 3 o'clock buzzer rang. She saw Zha turn off the single-folder and walk toward the timeclock. Marian punched her card and stepped for the door. She paused inside, looking at the heat radiating off the blacktop entry road, eyeing the clouds of dirt raised in the lot as the younger guys roared off in their pickups.

Marian felt no great urge to go out the door, to leave the heavenly air-conditioning behind. She could see it was a killer outside. "Gonna stand here gawking all night, or are you leaving?" She shrugged as Judith went past her and out. The surge of steaming air felt like a hand on her chest, pushing her back in the plant, and she poked the door shut after Judith and took the next to last hit off her cigarette.

"Please pardon me," came the soft, swirling voice behind her.

Marian almost jumped as she turned aside. Zha stood politely to her right, and Marian looked from her clasped, work-gloved hands to the tiny floral pattern in the scarf that held her long,

molasses-colored hair off her downturned face.

"Sure, sure, go right on," Marian said, a tadbit flustered, "hot out though."

"That is no problem," the slight woman replied. "It is very hot in parts of my homeland; I am used to it." She looked up at Marian and smiled brilliantly.

Marian took a quick breath, regained her composure, and opened the door for Zha with a slight flourish.

"Have a good first day?" she asked.

"I did indeed, thank you. But the forms seem almost alive, they are so difficult to box ... have a good evening."

"That's true," Marian admitted, "yeah, they do seem almost alive sometimes." She smiled and turned toward her beater, wishing she'd left the window open a crack in the morning. The car's interior would be like an incinerator. But she'd handle that with a couple of beers at the Tap with the guys. Just before she reached the stop sign at the end of the access road, she passed Zha, who was walking lightly down the curb. Sure was a good-looking woman. As she waved, she spied the gloves hanging from the back pocket of her jeans. No telling whether Zha had seen her wave, and Marian centered her attention on getting up the hill to her barstool. The Tap had air-conditioning.

Three weeks later, the temperature still averaged 95°. Zha still disappeared at noon, yet Marian hardly noticed, nursing a two-week-long hangover. Zha kept to herself a bit more than most folks, but the old ladies liked her because she was a good listener. Marian had tried to find out about Zha herself, only managing to learn that she was living with the Brezinskis, she and her mother and an older brother, in the basement apartment their kids had used. Her brother worked at the Shop 'n' Save. She hadn't offered to explain the absence of a father to Marian, and Marian hadn't pressed the point. She liked Zha, since she didn't pry into Marian's life, either. Truth was, Marian mostly liked to look at Zha while she worked.

"You're gonna have to buy yourself an air-conditioner," Felice said one morning. "I'm darn tired of watching you drag in here every day looking like last night's hairballs." Felice had cats. "It's enough to make me want to hide in the ladies' room, seeing you coming."

"Thanks a bunch, Felice."

"Well, what's the hold-up? You can afford one. Then you wouldn't have to spend every night in that den of iniquity. Be-

sides, you're getting a barroom crouch."

Marian frowned, merely shrugging in answer, as she slipped a roll of light blue paper onto the #2 spindle. Cripes, the thing must weigh a hundred-twenty five. But she had to lift the rolls — came with the job, and no way was she going to give Harry an opportunity to make "little lady" wisecracks.

As she strolled over to the Coke machine around 10:30, supposedly to give Felice a chance to slap shipping labels on the dozen or so unmarked cartons atop the skid, Marian scoped the bindery. Judith was bent over her desk, filling out a bill of lading; the UPS driver sipped at his coffee and lolled against some crates, waiting. Other women were shrinkwrapping, making boxes, operating the cutter, and across the bindery, Marian spotted Zha at the single-folder. Just as she looked, the fresh sheet billowed wildly out of the folding mechanism, smooth, unfolded, and with a mind of its own. Zha threw up her arms in disgust, slammed the stop button, then disappeared behind the machine. Marian grinned, shaking her head, as she dug in her Levis for a quarter. Cold Coke bottle sweating in hand, she started back to the collator.

"Saw you getting a chuckle out of Zha's little mishap. Why don't you give her some pointers about that old piece of junk?"

"Sure, Felice, maybe after lunch. Too frigging bad John thinks he has to recycle everything until it explodes in your hand."

"You just show Zha how to adjust the timing on that thing, OK?"

"I said OK, Felice, OK?" The two laughed as Marian cranked up their machine. When they worked well together, they really made hay, and with good numbers, they could afford to knock off a few minutes early for lunch. Plus, time went faster when Marian didn't have a chance to watch the clock.

Later, as she approached the single-fold, Marian wiped her forehead with an inky blue bandana, replaced it in her back-pocket, and wondered just how a woman as scrawny as Zha could lift those heavy rolls even the six inches onto the spindle. It took a lot of leverage to balance the weight while you slipped it sidewise, all done bent double: hard as hell on the lower back. She could see Zha's shoulder blades when she bent over to straighten some forms at the bottom of the carton, and when she stood up, Marian loudly said, "So how's tricks over here?"

Zha glanced over her shoulder, and then quickly returned her attention to the unwieldy row of forms. "Things aren't going

badly," she said, "although this large form is quite hard to box properly. They slip out of one's hands so easily."

"Yeah, and they just barely fit the machine. Here, lemme give ya a hand, Zha," and Marian slowed the machine as she flicked the forms still on the delivery back into a straight line with a sure gesture. "Who adjusted this delivery for you? I saw the thing spewing all over this morning."

Stuffing forms into the carton, Zha didn't look up as she said, "John adjusts the machinery each morning when he comes by to check. He is quite particular about it."

"I'll bet he is," Marian grumbled. "Let's turn 'er off for a sec so I can fix this." Marian tightened the allen nut with a wrench she pulled from her shirt pocket. "This ought to keep them from coming down the screws crooked—that's how they get off kilter on the delivery, you know." She turned to the smaller woman: "Actually, the forms would be easier to handle if you didn't wear those heavy gloves."

Zha put her hands in her back pockets and shifted her gaze toward the rolls near Marian's knees. "I must wear the gloves to protect my hands."

"How's that again?"

"It's nothing. I simply wish to avoid unnecessary papercuts," Zha said.

"Yeah, well, when you get used to the job, you don't get them so often." Marian admired the scarf holding Zha's thick, lustrous hair. "'S'at scarf from India? Pretty color blue."

Hastily, a gloved finger poked a stray strand of hair behind a coffee-colored ear, back under the material. Zha laughed, "No, this is from my home, Pakistan. Do you like it? I used to weave such things, in my uncle's shop."

"Pretty fancy stuff," Marian noted, "all those colors, those little threads."

"Practice is the key to that sort of work, just as it seems to be necessary here!"

"That's unfortunately true, but eating doesn't take much practice," Marian added, "and it's about lunchtime. Ya gonna have some lunch with us? Don't know why the devil you'd want to go out when it's so damn hot."

Zha just shook her head, then said so softly that Marian could barely hear her even with the machines down, "The heat reminds me of my obligations, so I walk. Thank you for your help, Marian." Marian nodded, as Zha turned toward the loading dock,

and she herself went toward the lunch-table.

Obligations? What the hell was she talking about? Zha's an odd one, alright. Wonder if it's this hot in Pakistan. Marian picked up her Coke from her workbench and handily caught the lunch-bag Felice tossed her way as she neared the fridge.

That night, the crack of billiard balls and clunk of beer cans on the bar at the Tap only aggravated the headache that had begun pounding in Marian's skull shortly after lunch. She finished off her seventh Pabst, said her goodbyes to Carol the bartender and to the regular gang, and went home to her cat. It was just getting dark. The asphalt sucked at her sneakers as she crossed the parking lot to her apartment house entryway, then made sticky noises as her shoes transferred the gook from the parking lot to the hall stairs. "Shit," she muttered to herself, thinking it wouldn't be hard for the landlord to figure out who tracked it in, since she was trailing it to her own doorway. Tough. Not much she could do about it, unless they laid out a red carpet for her.

Gotta get some aspirin, she decided, about five, to judge by the hammering in her temples. She turned on the floor fan as she went over to the tiny bathroom, dropping first her workshirt, then her shoes, then her bra, before she reached the cool tile and sat on the john to pull off her jeans and relieve herself of some of the beer she'd drunk.

In the kitchen, she ran a glass of water, plunked in a couple of ice cubes and walked back across the living room to her double bed next to the double windows, which she whipped up with a double bang. She flopped on the bed, reached for the fan, and leaned back into the pillows with a groan. Soon enough, Cat jumped up and began to knead her stomach, which reminded Marian that she'd skipped supper — again. Oh well, too late. If Zha could skip lunch every day, she could miss a supper or two. She nudged the purring cat over to her side, where she curled up possessively. "Little queenie, hey ..." Marian rubbed Cat's ears as she gazed out the windows, at the purpling evening clouds.

Strange one, that Zha. Wearing those goofy workgloves. Can't handle paper if you can't feel what you're doin'. Can't even adjust the delivery if you can't finetune. Look like baseball gloves at the end of her skinny little arms, anyway. Got broad shoulders though. But hardly any meat on her. Oughta eat lunch. Hardly even notice she's a girl, if it weren't for that gorgeous hair. Little tits don't even show through her shirt ... Pretty eyes, though. When she's not lookin' atcher feet. Talks good, for a foreigner. Wonder if she

went to an English school or somethin' ... Cat continued to purr as Marian fell off to sleep, her hand still resting lightly on the furry head.

In the morning, Marian woke groggily to the sun glaring through the sheers, with the drone of the fan like an insect at the back of her head. She felt gummy with sweat, but her mouth was dry. She gulped half of the stale water before she even thought about getting upright. Marian rubbed her temples and tried to remember what she'd been dreaming — seemed like she was someplace with Felice, who was shouting into her ear for a long time, probably all night, like half of yesterday, and something was wrong. Something was definitely wrong in the dream, but in the irritation of another blazing summer morning, she couldn't remember what it was. Something to do with webs, or — Aw, fuck it. No use worrying about it.

She looked at the silent alarm clock: it was already 25 to 7, which meant only 15 minutes to wash, dress, feed Cat, and make lunch, and still punch in on time. Tonight, she'd come home, skip the brew, do the laundry, get a *good* night's sleep. No more boozin' after work. That undoubtedly caused the lousy dreams; maybe she'd pick up an air-conditioner for the front window this weekend, Friday after she cashed her paycheck. She had a little money stashed away, too. "See ya later, Cat," she said as she closed and locked the door behind her and thudded down the steps. Another scorcher. Another day. But only two days till the weekend. She'd manage. Maybe it'd rain.

But it didn't rain on Wednesday, and by lunchhour Thursday, the sky was still the color of Marian's favorite turquoise ring, nary a cloud in sight. Even Felice was crabby. Marian mopped her forehead clocklike every 15 minutes: it was actually hot in the plant, which was supposed to be climate-controlled for the sake of the paper, an even 68° and virtually no humidity. She could tell the humidity was rising by the way the paper behaved. Each pressroll was a different length now, nothing matched up, nothing would run right. She could hear Al screaming at Sally, "Shuddup, will ya? Not a fuckin' thing I can do about this shit-for-presswork!" Even John, who could sit out the heat in his cushy office, had a go-round with Judith just before lunch. She saw Judith stomp off to the restroom, leaving John red in the face and loosening his tie. He headed for the single-folder.

"Look at that, will ya?" she hollered at Felice. "John can't get

enough satisfaction driving Judith to drink, he's gotta mess up Zha's machine to boot."

Felice spotted John rolling up his sleeves by the single-folder and just shook her head. "Some folks don't know when to quit, Marian. Hey — check the crimper on the left side, will you? It's pretty loose, and we already threw out 50,000 on this job."

Sonavabitch. Why the hell doesn't it rain? So hot in here you can't even think, much less do a decent day's work. Can't get this fucking job to run right, and tight-ass John can't twist the thermostat and cool this place off. Creep.

"Should be OK for a while, Felice. Lemme know if it runs into the pinholes again." It was a quarter to twelve, and not even time for a smoke since 8 o'clock, things were going so badly.

Marian noticed that part four, a nice 15# peach-toned paper, was actually running a little shorter than the other three humidity-lengthened parts. She spent five minutes adjusting the pins at the back of the machine, just above the roll, trying to set them enough faster than the others to stretch the part forward a bit. She checked the folded forms coming off the delivery, decided things still weren't matching up close enough, and leaned over the cylinder head to inspect the main pins. Why bother to shut off the damn machine? Only five minutes till lunch. She glanced at the clock as she reached into her back pocket for a screwdriver, and felt the paper ride up off the pins under her fingertips — automatically, she pushed down and back on the moving sheets.

"SON OF A BI—"

Felice looked up as Marian's eyes widened, as her arm jerked up and back, away from the head with its razor-sharp perforating blades. It was like watching a slo-mo replay on Monday Night Football; the tanned arm rose in a smooth, lazy arc, and the blood flew off on its own, slightly perpendicular arc, each drop glittering and distinct under the fluorescent glare. She saw Marian's right hand come up to catch the left hand, saw the right hand drag the left to her chest, saw Marian's mouth moving, wide open, knew she was screaming, but didn't hear the sound.

As Felice slammed the emergency STOP button, halting the collator, she saw Marian turn away from the cylinder, lose her balance, and begin to fall toward the workbench in a third, crazy arc of movement. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught the bright bloodstains on the last two dozen folds of forms on the delivery. She jumped around the side of the delivery, tried to catch the falling woman, but she wasn't as quick as she used to be.

At last her ears seemed to kick in — she heard the rotten fruit thud as Marian's head banged into the workbench. She hadn't even tried to break her fall; she still clutched her left hand in the fist of her right when she hit the floor, her forearms in a vee between her breasts, like praying.

Cracking her shin on the steps of the platform, Felice swore, then knelt by Marian on the cool concrete floor. By now, there was blood all over the front of Marian's blue workshirt. She lay on her side, blood running out between her clenched fingers onto the dark grey cement, a small puddle already forming. Felice cradled her head and bellowed up at Al, who was gaping stupidly over the top of his still-running collator, "What the blazes are you STARING at?? Get some help, you stupid jackass!"

Startled into action by Felice's shrillness, Al hit his stop and yelled over to the foreman, "Get the first aid, Harry! Emergency!" Then he jumped down and followed Sal around the end of his machine.

Sally moaned, clapped a hand over her mouth, and ran for the restroom.

Girl never did have a stomach, Felice thought grimly as she pushed Marian's damp hair off her forehead. The tears forming in Felice's eyes slid unnoticed into the laugh lines, as if she were only sweating. She could see that Marian had been knocked out, but a twitch of her cheek signalled that she was coming around. One less thing to really worry about. The girl had a hard head. As Harry slid to a stop, first aid kit in hand, Felice gently tried to pry Marian's hands apart to assess the injury. Al had stopped paying attention and was staring again, this time under Marian's running platform. He took a couple steps in that direction.

"It's her fucking finger," Al said.

"No shit," Harry growled back.

"No, I mean it's her FINGER," Al repeated.

He pointed under the machine, and Harry groaned when he realized what Al meant. "Well, don't just stand there, pick it up and wrap it in a clean shoprag."

Al did as he was told, and the lunchbuzzer rang. The mechanical background stilled, and the only sound was Felice's low murmur as she rocked Marian in her arms, holding the woman's face away as Harry wrapped a rubberband around the hemorrhaging knuckle.

"Tell Judith to call the paramedics," he told Al tersely.

"Goddammit, John, people can't work in a friggin' oven!"

Judith's chin was set hard, her arms crossed beneath her breasts, the muscles in her forearm flexing, unflexing.

John looked passively out the window of his office, down onto the floor. The workers were congregated in tense clusters at the various worktables. No one seemed to be eating. The clock registered 12:27.

"...telling you, and if you *don't* there's gonna be hell to pay!" Judith slammed the door open and crashed it closed behind her.

Wasn't his fault. Couldn't have the repairmen out to work on the AC; it wasn't broken; it was just too hot to make a difference. He shook his head and shuffled a pile of papers into his OUT basket.

The paramedics had finally shown up at 12:17. They bundled the shocked and shaking woman onto a stretcher, taking her pulse as they moved rapidly toward the loading area. They'd pulled the medivan right up to the dock, slipping the stretcher in and roaring off through the noonhour heat waves, flashing red and blue lights. Felice watched from near Judith's desk, Harry beside her, her arms around herself to touch something solid. Most of the other women, including Zha, stood uncertainly by the Coke machine. Nobody talked.

Once the paramedics had disappeared from sight, Felice walked slowly toward the ladies' room. She was covered with blood, and she knew she may as well pitch the blouse and slacks. She didn't really care. As she went in the door marked "Ladies," one of the younger women stepped back, then went out. She looks like the devil, thought Felice. Better get used to this. It'll happen again before she's left here. She didn't look in the mirror, just scrubbed her arms with gunk, wiped her face with wet papertowels, then sat down on the cot to collect her thoughts.

The finger had been too badly mutilated to reattach. Really, Marian thought as she lay staring at the mintgreen ceiling of the semiprivate room, lucky to've only lost the one. And they probably had a hard time saving the little one. She closed her eyes and strained back into the pillow, trying to push the pain out of her consciousness. She only managed to bump her sore head against the bed. Damn, what else? Can't believe how much it hurts, probably the painkiller's wearing off. Wonder what time it is? Looks dark out. At least it's cool in here.

She didn't want to consider her mistake, how dumb her

reaction had been when she felt the cold metal of the cylinder head. First fucking thing they tell you, when you start on the machine — never jerk your hand back if you feel it's getting caught. Hit the fucking stop button. Never jerk away. That's how you get your fingers ripped off, when you jerk away ... She banged her right fist into the bed beside her. Always did learn by doing. Nobody to blame but herself, not paying attention; she knew better, working next to the blades. Never take your eyes off the machine. She remembered looking at the clock. Dumb mistake, Mar. Dumbshit.

She felt like punching herself out. So dumb. Of course, it could have been worse. Half a ringfinger, some nasty cuts on the pinkie, on her hand, lost a lot of blood, a slight concussion, according to the duty nurse. She wasn't sure how she hit her head — must've fallen off the platform. All she could remember was the pain, the blood spreading on the canary part one, pulling her hand to her chest, trying to hold herself together. Could've been worse.

When she woke up the next morning, there was a note from Felice on her nightstand, written on the back of a hospital form. Marian automatically checked whether the form was centered, with even margins, and she squinted to read the microscopic name of a rival printer at the bottom. Then she read the note:

Dear Marian —

Stopped and ate at the Comfy Café after work so I could stop here to see how you're doing. But you're asleep. Look like you need it kiddo. Spoke to the head nurse, she said they operated on your hand but everything would be fine. She said they are watching you because of the concussion. You sure cracked your head a dandy!! on the bench.

Well sweetie, I've waited until 9 pm and kept you company, but you didn't wake up yet. Probably for the best. Enjoy the cool in here, it's hotter than hades outside still.

Everybody said to tell you they're thinking of you. Judith said Harry said you should take at least a week off, honey. So just rest yourself and don't worry about a thing. You know I'll miss you — call me when they let you out! Which the nurse said should be Saturday morning. I'd visit tomorrow after work but I told my daughter-in-law that I'd help her with Eddie's birthday party (7th). I'll stop by the Opendoor Tap and tell your friend Carol you're here on my way home. Just let the nurses and doctors take care of you Marian — they know best.

Marian rubbed her nose. The note was signed "Love you, honeybunch — Felice." She flipped the page over, as if expecting to see more on the other side, and seeing the print again, realized Felice had swiped her records chart. Nothing on it yet but her name; the night nurse had probably just gotten another one. Wonder if she missed this one, Marian snorted. Her hand hurt like sin, but her head felt better.

Saturday morning, when Marian left the hospital, a large gauze boxing glove where her left hand normally was, she remembered her car was still down at the plant. Carol had come by after the early shift at the Tap Friday, and Marian had gotten her to run by the apartment to feed Cat and to bring back some clean clothes. She hadn't thought about the car. Oh well, only nine or ten blocks to the plant. Time to meditate or something. Takes a bit of gettin' used to, being a nine-fingered dyke. Sort of like gettin' castrated, she commented to a beagle tied up under a tree on somebody's closely-clipped lawn. Could've been the NEXT finger — hell, could've been the RIGHT hand. There's some mercy.

Her thoughts continued down that morbid vein, and soon enough, she stood outside the loading dock door. Hesitated. Get a fuckin' grip on yourself, she whispered. It's all over. Wonder what they did with the finger, she thought as she entered the relatively dark, cool plant. Probably out with the trash.

Only a few people were working Saturdays, to get the Navy job out just a few weeks late. She saw John duck into his office, Judith at one of the single-folders. Then she saw Zha step from the side aisle down in the corner of the building, her arms laden with flat, unmade boxes. Zha's expression changed rapidly from non-committal to a grin when she recognized Marian, and she leaned back to wave. Still had on the silly gloves, Marian noticed as she waved back with her free hand, the mummified one hanging from a sling. She yelled, "Come down an' see you guys in a minute — gotta pick up my check."

Half an hour later, after a brusque exchange with John about insurance, Marian exited the office, stopped to buy a Coke — good thing her change was in her right pants pocket — and ambled back to the rear of the bindery where Judith and Zha were working. Judith watched her approach and turned off her machine when Marian neared it. "How ya doing, Marian?"

She nodded. "Could be worse. Got a little headache still, and of course, my hand is killing me, but I'm OK."

"Good. They couldn't save it, could they?"

"Nah. Like trying to turn hamburger into steak. But it'll be OK, Judith." At least, I hope so, she added to herself.

Judith's face was a map of empathy. "I told John he'd better do something about the AC, or he'll be one sorry S.O.B."

"Aw, don't blame him, Judy, it was my own fault for not payin' close enough attention." She guzzled about half of the 10 oz. Coke.

"Huh."

Marian smiled, then gestured toward Zha, who was diligently stuffing the monstrous forms into an equally monstrous carton as her folder rattled along. "How's she doin'?"

Judith cocked her head and looked soberly at Zha. "You know, I can't figure out how that woman puts out as many forms as she does. She's inexperienced, she's got John on her tail, and she's always wearing those clumsy gloves. But she averages around 90,000 a day anyway."

"That's pretty good for a greenhorn," Marian agreed. "Think I'll go ask for her secret. I may need some tips!"

She stepped closer to the old single-folder. "How's it goin'?" she said to Zha, who hardly turned to acknowledge her.

"Things are fine for *me*," she replied over her shoulder, "but how are you? I did not see your accident; I wanted to finish one last carton before lunch, so I did not learn what had happened until just before the ambulance arrived."

"It's OK."

"I'll stop and talk in a moment," Zha said, glancing at the clock.

Marian involuntarily checked the time — 11:57. Shit. Double-shit, *deja vu*. "OK," she said, leaning against a full skid. "No rush." She gulped more Coke to settle her stomach.

Marian looked around the bindery, then gazed a moment at her own machine. She turned quickly away. The mess had been cleaned off the machinery itself, but the bloodspattered forms still lay on the delivery. She shook her head, half to conceal a shiver. The buzzer rang; the two single-folders stopped.

"That's it for today, Zha," Judith called as she went to punch out.

"They never want to pay overtime, no matter how rushed the job is," Marian noted.

"Apparently so," Zha replied, as she staple-gunned the last box shut.

"Wanna ride uptown? I came to pick up my car." Marian and Zha were walking toward the timeclock. "It's cooler today, I guess, but still pretty hot."

"I would appreciate it. I would like to talk with you, anyway."

Marian moved to open the steel door, but Zha beat her to it.

"Please, allow me."

"No problem! Couldn't stop you if I wanted!" Laughing, they went out into the sunlight.

Marian tossed Zha the keys to open her own car door, climbed in herself and pulled the hardpack of Marlboros out from the pocket beneath the sling. Closed up for two days, the car reeked of stale smoke. As she slid onto the seat, Zha handed Marian the keys. "It will be difficult to drive with only one hand."

"Oh, I guess I'll manage, I think." She noticed Zha's gloved hands lying in her lap. She glanced up at her face, in time to catch an odd look pass over it. "What's the matter?"

"It is nothing. I was just thinking of the past, which is not always a pleasant occupation."

"Yeah, I know JUST what you mean. My recent past is entirely UNpleasant." Marian's joke met no laughter from the other woman.

"My past is gone," Zha said firmly; "I left it behind me in Karachi."

"Where's that?" Marian touched the redhot lighter to the tip of the Marlboro.

Zha's eyelids flickered. "It is the main port of Pakistan, where I boarded a ship which took me to Bombay."

"Say, that's in India, isn't it?"

"It is, indeed."

Marian started the Chevy with a pump of the gas pedal, and put the gearshift into reverse before she grabbed the wheel again.

"I imagine you feel rather awkward," said Zha softly.

"Well, yeah, I guess so," Marian looked at Zha out of the corner of her eye as she shifted into drive, "but the docs said once the bandage is off, it'll be no time till I get back to normal ... whatever that is."

Zha murmured her assent as the car rolled out of the lot, raising dust. Turning onto St. Mark, going up the hill from the riverfront, Marian steadied the wheel with her bandaged hand while she flipped on the radio and settled a baseball cap on her short hair. She sidewise examined Zha, again admiring her long, dark hair. She felt another twinge in her gut as the picture of her

hands running through hair like that exploded into the new image of a mutilated hand, a half-digit short.

"Is something wrong, Marian? You don't look well—"

"I'm OK," too quickly.

"As I said earlier, perhaps you would like to talk ... Could we go for a drive, out among the fields? It has been so long since I saw such farmland as there is here."

"Sure, we could go for a spin. Do you guys have farms in Pakistan?"

Zha giggled. "Of course! What do you think we eat, rocks? Oh, I'm sorry; I did not mean to be offensive —"

"Nah, 's OK. It was a dumb question. Really, what do they grow there?"

"In the northern plain, where I lived, the land is wide and good for agriculture, much like the land here in the American Midwest. There are wheat, rice, and of course, cotton." Her voice caught. "It is sometimes hard for me, to be so far away." Zha watched in silence as they drove past the village limits, onto a blacktop road between a corn field and a soybean field.

"Corn's tall, but lookin' a little brownish," Marian commented. "Too blasted dry for it this summer." She, too, fell silent, and they drove for a quarter of an hour, past fencerows and lone cribs where farm houses had once stood alongside. An occasional redwing blackbird rose from the tall grasses in the ditch to fly purposefully across a field.

"Would it be possible to go for a short walk, perhaps there, along that line of trees?"

Marian nodded and parked the car off to the side of the gravel road. "I don't think I should walk very far, though."

"No. I just wanted to find a peaceful place where we could sit in the shade." They skirted the barbwire fence to follow a line of willows along a cut through the field, one lying fallow and grown up with clover.

Marian's thoughts were jumbled up like Chiclets in a gumball machine. If Zha were a lesbian, this excursion would've been romantic. As it was, she felt almost hesitant, especially since Zha had failed to mention a topic for their intended chat. Wonder what she's got up her sleeve. Can't imagine. Marian tried to recall whether she'd ever read anything about Pakistan in *Newsweek*, or seen anything on TV, but could only vaguely recollect something about a coup, or a revolution. Figured. But no way Zha could have that kind of crap on her mind, a beautiful day like today.

Following her, Marian contentedly observed how Zha's short, lithe legs moved quietly through the greenery, now and then stepping aside for a thistle. Her ass was tight, hips narrow, the sort Marian generally liked. She chastised herself silently. They probably don't even HAVE lesbians in Pakistan anyhow. Specially not if they're all Moslems. Got enough problems without that. Marian continued her perusal of the woman's back. Shoulder blades not quite so prominent any more, or maybe she's just worn a larger shirt. Hope she's putting on some weight. Zha had let her hair free to enjoy the slight breeze that kept the afternoon from becoming sweltering — at least, out in the country. And as the woman's arms swung with her strides, Marian pursed her lips: *still* wearing those fucking canvas gloves! What the hell for? Pretty unlikely she'd get any paper cuts out here in the boonies. Their pace slowed, until Zha stopped to sit under an exceptionally large swamp willow, on an extraordinarily luscious patch of long, silky grass.

"Better than a lawn, hey?" Marian suddenly felt the space around them like a weight on her head; it seemed she could hear every bug for a mile. Uncomfortably, she broke the stillness in the most characteristic way she knew. "The day's almost as gorgeous as you are, Zha."

For a minute, the Pakistani did not reply, just stared off toward the nearly invisible white watertower in town. Marian had time to bite her tongue.

"So it was said, Marian. In Pakistan, several young men negotiated with my father for my marriage."

It was Marian's turn for silence. Zha had never mentioned her father before. Family was probably Moslem, then; she recalled reading something about fixed marriages. Zha sighed.

"But I did not ask you for this pleasant little trip to discuss Pakistani social traditions. Nor did I seek to be provocative." She smiled at Marian's bewildered expression. "I know that you are a lesbian, Marian. There are few secrets in a town this size — nor are there many women as handsome as yourself."

Marian flushed with embarrassment.

"You see, I have travelled in Europe, both before and since my exile from my home. Indeed, my family's cosmopolitan character certainly contributed to our position of danger during General Zia's regime. We knew too many foreigners, too many liberals within the country. My uncle was once a friend of Bhutto. Ah, this must be confusing to you, this business of foreign politics. Ameri-

cans are lucky to be able to live such an insulated existence."

Marian didn't know whether to feel congratulated or criticized. She plucked a foxtail with her good hand and chewed on it thoughtfully. Zha waited a moment, but when no response came, she continued.

"You are perhaps unfortunate that I am observant; I am watchful, because one must learn the ways of one's hosts. I do not wish for you Americans to believe that we Pakistanis are barbaric or unable to adapt to your culture."

Frowning, Marian blurted out a negative: "Why would I, I mean we, think somethin' like that? That's ignerent."

Zha leaned back onto the grass. "Perhaps because we all are afraid of what's strange, Marian. The world is full of menacing things, and one's own fears are perhaps the most terrifying of all." Her black eyes lent impact to her soft voice. "And it seems to me now that you are very much afraid."

Marian jerked her head away. Swallow hard. Take time to breathe. "Why wouldja think a goofy thing like that, Zha? After all, you don't hardly know me." When Marian turned back, Zha saw how her face had hardened.

"Oh, Marian, don't be a fool. You are a lesbian in a small town where all those who are foreign are suspect. Yet that's only a part of it."

Marian still couldn't meet Zha's gaze. All she said was, "Well, what's your point?" She waited, watching two dragonflies joust amid a clump of dried cattails.

"How do you feel about your accident, Marian?"

The question surprised her, and Marian felt as if the dragonflies had buzzed into her brain, filling her head with their dull, stupefying roar. She shook her head, as much to shake out the droning insects as to answer the question. She didn't know the answer, so she waited. She was good at waiting; she often thought she'd spent her whole life waiting, 31 years. The voice began again:

"I've noticed you noticing my gloves. Marian, I'm not afraid of papercuts. Do you truly wish to know the purpose of my gloves?" Zha paused, and when again no answer came, she continued, "In a way, it is easier for me here than it was in London. Here, at the factory, I have an excuse, a reason to wear the gloves. Almost everyone is used to them, as if they are a part of me. I suppose most of the others think that I am a snob, that I don't wish to spoil my hands —"

"No way," Marian interrupted, "We're not like that, at least nobody's said anything like that to me." She shifted her position uncomfortably.

"I'm glad," Zha's face neutral, "for that is far from the truth." Marian cradled her gauze-wrapped left hand; the finger, or something unseen, was beginning to throb. Though she was always soft-spoken, even overly polite, Zha now seemed particularly hesitant. This conversation was starting to make Marian feel nervous, even a little afraid, unsure why, unsure what to say. She listened to a far-off crow, an even more distant tractor. "What are you trying to tell me, Zha?" she asked finally.

Marian sat with her back half-turned to the other woman, so she heard, rather than saw, when Zha slid a few feet closer over the grass. Marian felt a light touch on her left shoulder, a touch that closed into a firmer grasp. She wished it would go away. Too intense.

"Marian, are you listening?" She nodded. "What I must tell you is very difficult for me, as well." She nodded again. Reassured, Zha went on. "They knew about us, about my father's political views, about my uncle's friendship with Bhutto. They followed us outside of Pakistan; they followed us secretly when we went abroad on holiday. Zia's men knew all there was to know about us."

A blackbird swooped past, dipped, continued away.

"They knew that I loved to work at the weaving for my uncle. They also knew that I was something of a problem to my father; they knew that, nevertheless, he often confided in me. They knew that I was a feminist, even that I was a lesbian. They knew everything." Zha felt Marian's shoulder twitch slightly. "Marian, Marian. Of course I knew immediately that you were a lesbian. I have eyes," she laughed dryly. "At times, I wished that I were blind, believe me. My uncle was killed by the military during Zia's coup. Later, most of the men in my family were placed under arrest. I, too, was detained, imprisoned. Do you know what it is to lose your freedom, Marian?"

"I was in jail for a weekend once, after a barfight, if that's the same."

"Yes, more or less the same. I was not so lucky as some, luckier than others." She stopped speaking, and her hand shifted away from Marian's shoulder.

"What're you trying to say, Zha? It's OK, you know." Marian vacillated between curiosity and apprehension. Be patient, she

cautioned herself.

"As I said, they knew all about us, about me. The men of Islam can be cruel, Marian. Even though they knew everything, already, they interrogated me daily, every night. I knew virtually nothing, but they had means of stimulating one's creativity. I told them lies, thousands of lies, anything to get them to leave me in peace."

What'd they do, Marian wondered as a sick feeling washed through her. Rape her? God only knows. She waited. Zha sighed again, barely audibly, and Marian recognized the sound, saw herself lying on the white hospital bed. A tremor shook her body.

"There is no way to make it easier, Marian. You must simply look at my hands."

She felt Zha take hold of her shoulders again, and she didn't resist being turned around to face her. The gloves lay beside them on the grass. Zha touched her cheek gently, fleetingly, as she lifted her hands from Marian's shoulders.

"Look, Marian. This is what they did to the hands of a lesbian."

Marian frowned and looked down at the hands held before her. She didn't, couldn't speak. What she saw was unspeakable.

When the hands began to shake, Marian raised her head, and with one finger of her good hand pushed aside the tear that ran along Zha's aquiline nose. Zha's eyes were closed.

Gut-wrenching pain arced through her left hand, down into the finger that was not a finger any more. What could she say? How could they have done this? How could she stand the pain?

Almost whispering, as if reading her mind, Zha was saying, "They told me that the hands which sought the fire of a woman, that which is Allah's gift to mankind, should take joy in the fire Allah put in their hearts, should take joy in the fire."

It was just too fucking much. Shaking, Marian cried, covering her face with her free hand.

"I know how hard it is to look upon, Marian; I know how hard."

Her hands had probably been strong. Now, the slender fingers were covered with angry red scars, the skin twisted, as if trying to tear itself away from licking flames.

"It was not an accident, Marian; they were quite persuasive, those who tortured the prisoners, so I did as they wished, and put my hands into the fire. But I felt no joy in my hands, only in my heart. They did not have to force me to do this; I even laughed at

them. But I was afraid, and they knew that, too. Now, I am ashamed."

Marian shook her head emphatically.

"You see, you were fortunate, Marian. One can lose more than a finger. Now, we are almost the same ... our hands know the pain and the pleasure as well. Do you understand?"

Marian nodded slowly, and offered her open hand to Zha, who placed one of her own within it. They sat that way for a long time; the dragonflies flew away.

"Fuck them," Marian said at last.

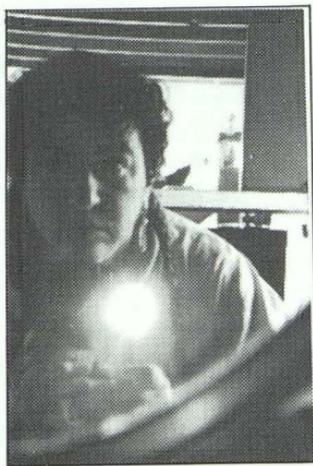
"I am forgetting them," Zha replied.

"It really hurts today," Marian whispered.

"It will heal," Zha replied.

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The Sinister Wisdom Editorial Workers



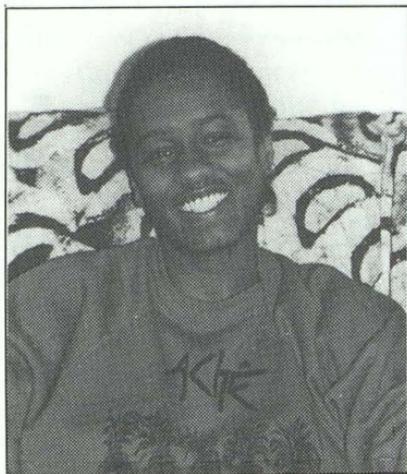
JASMINE MARAH

Working on SW has shown me that although friendship is not a requisite for community, community is a good soup for the development of friendship. Photographing the SW community has been very dear to me. The wimmin are extraordinarily varied and interesting to the photographer's eye. I give them thanks.



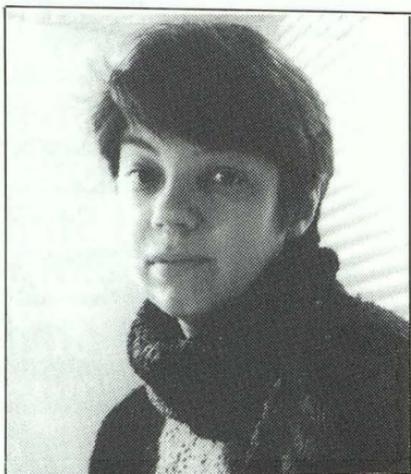
MARLANE COOK

A sober dyke separatist who as a rookie "member" of SW has learned that mailings are more fun than editorial gatherings because they get done in one afternoon, but either way to hang out with enlightened lesbians that stimulate my head and my heart is truly worth a motorcycle ride across the bay.



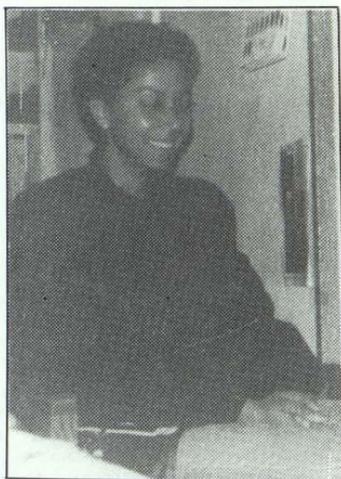
WINN GILMORE

Exploring life's dykeotomies is powerful, and sometimes sinister, but — and I believe you know it — never boring. May the Orixas bring all good to us all.



CARYATIS CARDEA

I am a working class lesbian separatist. I work on SW because.



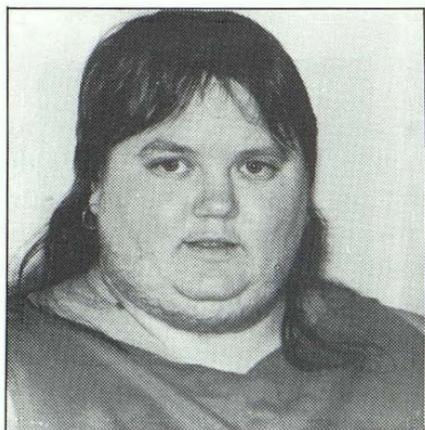
DEEANNE DAVIS

I'm a native Iowan living in the East Bay. As a writer and editor, I have been reading for SW to gain more editing experience and to broaden my understanding of the lives women lead through the many stories they tell with their words.



BETTY DUDLEY

I'm from Missouri. I came to San Francisco for the dykes. I work on Sinister Wisdom for the same reason.



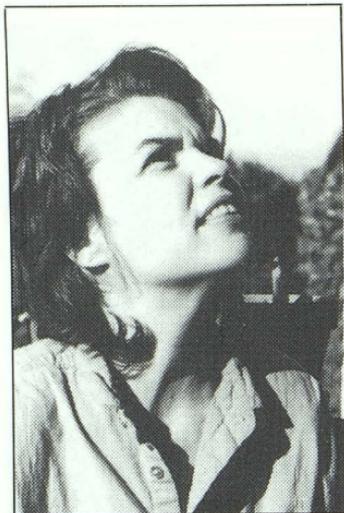
CATH THOMPSON

Cath's acid comments can eat through steel, but rarely through the opinions of the other SW editorial readers. She has little tolerance for obscure poetry and obtuse people, and does not hesitate to comment on them — usually to someone's regret. Her saving grace is her certainty that she is a better editor than a writer.



VALERIE STOEHR

I'm 28, grew up in Minnesota, and am now living in Oakland, California. I work on SW so I can read great Lesbian writing and discuss great Lesbian thoughts.



NAJA SORELLA

I'm 38, mostly home-bound/bed-bound by chronic illness, going on 7 years. I have a wonderful lover of nearly 6 years. Since I can't attend writing classes, I joined SW as it allows me to read a variety of writings, and hear other women's opinions on them. I also like being part of a creative group that's committed to putting out a lesbian oriented politically aware journal.



SUSANJILL KAHN (SJ)

I joined SW two years ago when I turned forty — seemed like a great place to have a mid-life crisis. Instead, I found myself knee-deep in creativity, politics and dykes with warmth and wit. Oh yeah, and knee-deep in deadlines, xeroxes, endless meetings and difficult decisions. It ain't all a bed o'roses.



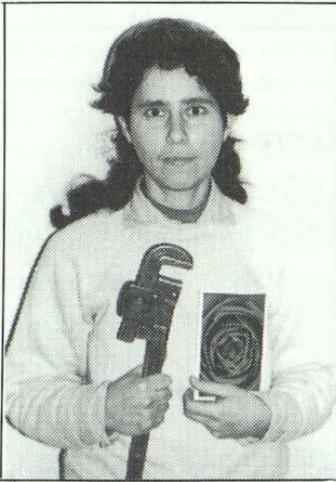
SUSAN LEVINKIND

Excuse me? Can I say hello to all my friends in Northampton? Okay? Okay. Hi everybody! I love you! Here I am in California!



ELANA DYKEWOMON

Sinister Wisdom is one long learning curve that wrapped around my life and turned it inside out. It's the most fun you can have without making money.



LISA CARLIN

Commie, Jew, Dyke. Blue-collar bad attitude. Poet trickster. Works on Sinister Wisdom to slip something by Elana.



JUDY FREESPIRIT

Taping SW for Women's Braille Press allows me, as a disabled lesbian, to do work consistent with my politics without ever having to attend a meeting and at the same time give vent to my life-long desire to be a performer from a vantage point safe from flying eggs and rotten tomatoes. What could be more perfect?



After putting out eight issues, we thought it was time for you to get a glimpse of who we are. The photos above, by Jasmine Marah, are of the current, regular editorial and production group. Dykes who joined for more than two issues since we moved to California, but have since moved on, include: Heidi Henken, Lisa Gerick, Laura Israel, Laura Post, Samantha Elin, Joan Drury and Ariban.



Friends who *regularly* help us with kibbitzing, suggestions, mailings, proofreading and the like: Gloria Anzaldúa, Dolphin Zelda Waletzky, Barbara Ruth, Kit Quan, Cindy Cooper, Susan Goldberg, Debbie Fier, Elizabeth Fides, Kim Swineheart, Anita Schriver, Tavie Tipton, Casey Fisher, Louise Rafkin. You can often find their names on the inside front cover, but we wanted to thank them again. And thanks to all the dykes who've volunteered for an issue, or a mailing or to type a story, over the last three and a half years — we couldn't have done it without any of you!

Montréal, December 9, 1989

Violence and Terror

"Madman shoots 14 women," screams the headline of Montréal's *La Presse* on December 7, 1989, the day after the killing of 14 young women at the École polytechnique de Montréal.

Everyone is eager to label the killer a "sick" and "insane" person. Yet, in the Dec. 8 *La Presse*, journalists state that the murderer, Marc Lépine, "seems to have led a relatively uneventful existence. He did not drink or smoke, was most likely not a drug user." He was not known to be aggressive toward women. Jean-Pierre Trudel wrote in *Le Journal de Montréal* on Dec. 8, "there was nothing that led to believe he could have committed the demented act last Wednesday." So why insist, after the fact, on inventing a psychological profile that the killer did not seem to have? To reduce the killer to a case of deviant psychological makeup with no "scientific" facts to back it up seems a bit suspicious. To treat him as an individual case of psychological deviancy is to deny that he is a social being. This minimizes the impact and the meaning of his action.

In some cases, the social meaning of the massacre of 14 women is hesitantly broached. According to Montréal mayor Jean Doré, the killing "is the work of a madman, but it's also a sign that some men haven't yet accepted...equality between men and women." Should we conclude that all men who haven't accepted equality between men and women, and there are a lot of them, are mad?

The murderer, Marc Lépine, revealed the political and social meaning of his action in a letter found on his body after the massacre: "I hate feminists," he wrote. That is why he killed 14 women. His action was motivated and premeditated. As well, he had a "hit list" of 19 other targets, all influential and successful women. His action was, in fact, a terrorist campaign directed against women and lesbians.

Let's pretend for a moment that Marc Lépine was in fact mad, as everyone seems to want to believe. If this is true, why exactly was he mad? Simply because he went to extremes in his violence against women, by killing 14 of them at once. Every day, the Montréal newspapers and newspapers all over the world report the murder of women by men. Montréal's mass murderer is no different, in our opinion, from those who made the front page of newspapers after murdering their wives while out on bail, or dismembering 13-year-old girls or perpetrating all those other crimes against women that are conveniently dismissed as "family tragedies."

In fact, by committing such extreme woman-hating actions, these men's only crime was attracting public attention on what must remain secret and hidden: the day-to-day oppression of women by men, in every way, shape and form. By being so careless in their action, they committed an unforgivable error: to risk blowing the cover on the ways in which the class of men ensures, holds and maintains the power of life and death over the class of women as a whole.

These men are no different from those who "manhandle," rape or threaten their wives, girlfriends, neighbors, strangers, co-workers, daughters, nieces, sisters and their friends' daughters; those who force their sexual fantasies or pornographic material on their partners, who force them to bear unwanted children; those who harass women with their sexual and other degrading jokes, their lecherous looks, sexual innuendo and disrespectful comments; or those who, either jokingly or dead serious, deplore that the killer didn't kill more of those "feminists."

It is only a question of degree and conspicuousness. In cases of extreme violence that are brought to public attention through the media, the class of men is quick to disown, for appearances' sake, the individual member who has gone too far in acting on his hatred of women. The greater the risk of revealing the workings of the social system of oppression of women by men, the more extreme the method of dealing with the individual who has transgressed this unspoken rule: the class of men throws one of its members of the wolves in order to protect the rest of the pack. If they don't commit suicide, mass murderers are either shot down by police marksmen or lynched by other prison inmates. The result is the elimination of the careless member, who endangers the right to continue to exert individual and collective power over all women and to maintain, in doing so, the individual and collective appropriation of the class of women by the class of men. This is the technique used in the case of the "madman" of the Montréal Polytechnic School. In the case of the murderers of women, the class of men makes an example of the man who has killed one woman, or fourteen women, in order that all other men may quietly continue to kill by inches the women they live, work or are in contact with, by the most ingenious, varied and subtle means.

In fact, it's a case where you can't see the forest for the trees.

Jan S., Céline L., Danielle C., Francine M., Christiane A., Hélène M., Jeanne-Mance P., Louise T., Patrizia T., Élise D., Diane H., Julie P., Dyane C., Ginette B., Danièle T., Dominique M., Danièle C., Constance D., Johanne C., Pascale N., Gerry R., Suzanne V., Montréal, Québec.

For political reasons, we have not given our surnames.

The Other Sappho,* a novel by Ellen Frye. (1989, \$8.95. Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850)

Sappho I leave you against my will —
I answered, go happily
and remember me,
you know how we cared for you,
if not, let me remind you ...
we did have good times.
— Sappho of Lesbos

Age only makes her stronger. The small, dark lover of women who gave us our name, poet unsurpassed whose haunting stanzas have resisted censorship for 26 hundred years, now laughs, presides, rants, trembles and beguiles in the pages of Ellen Frye's novel, *The Other Sappho*.

Ellen further advances the legend by introducing Sappho's companion Lykaina, an illiterate, equally gifted composer who recites in an oral, improvisational style.

Since the third century b.c., rumors about "another Sappho" have persisted in folklore and scholarly discourse. Surely, in the words of Carol Seajay, "if there was one 'Sappho' whose work has survived all these centuries, then there must have been others like her."

The story of this "other Sappho," as envisioned by Frye, is that of a baby with a twisted foot, left in the hills to die, found and adopted, then sold into slavery by her foster-brother; a talented singer who runs away from her comfortable but unfree life in Sparta to find her way to Lesbos and apprentice herself to "the Tenth Muse," as Sappho was called. Along the way she forms unconventional friendships with a fast-talking peddler, a prostitute, a little rich girl, a so-called "madwoman" and a deaf slave. And then she meets Sappho ...

* *The Other Sappho* is Ellen Frye's second novel; her first, *Look Under the Hawthorne*, published in 1987 by New Victoria, tells the story of a Vermont bardyke who quits her job and goes looking for the daughter she gave up for adoption 32 years ago.

Ellen Frye does the story justice. Fluent in Greek, author of *The Marble Threshing Floor* (a collection of 110 Greek folksongs recorded as she traveled from village to village), Ellen uses her feel for Greek rhythms and imagery in a way that pulls the reader into this long-ago and faraway world. Surviving fragments of Sappho's poetry have been woven into the dialogue, and Lykaina's wild, unschooled lyrics are equally enchanting.

Besides enchant, this story asks intelligent, crucial questions. Can a woman of privilege and a woman from the school of hard knocks live as lovers without infringing on each other? How do we protect ourselves from male intrusion, how restore what men have violated? And what hope is there for reconciling after the pain we cause each other?

— Koré Archer

Books Received

Below are brief descriptions of books we've received for review in the last four months. We have limited space for reviews, yet the books below deserve your attention. We list books from women's presses, and books by lesbians, or by women and of interest to lesbians, from alternative and mainstream presses. We encourage our readers to support womyn's bookstores in their areas. If you order from this list, be sure to add postage to the list price of the books (\$1.25 for the first book, at least 50¢ for each additional book from the same press). We particularly urge you to *support womyn's presses*: the possibility of getting our work to each other depends on their survival.

Desert Years: Undreaming The American Dream — an account of moving from Cambridge to a desert county park community of old people, mostly women, as an effort to provide "a small base of hope" to those ready to cast off consumerism and patriarchal culture — by Cynthia Rich, 1989, \$7.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, PO Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.
Coz, a metaphysical thriller about the old woman who controls the place where life and death meet, by Mary Pjerrou, 1989, \$9.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press.

Thirteen Steps — An Empowerment Process for Women, a non-linear, non-hierarchical approach to transformation and change by Bonita L. Swan, 1989, \$8.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press.

Spirited Lesbians — Lesbian Desire As Social Action, a spectrum of essays by Nett Hart, 1989, \$9.95, Word Weavers, PO Box 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0742.

Bubbe Meisehs by Shayneh Maidelehs: An Anthology of Poetry by Jewish Granddaughters About Our Grandmothers, edited by Lesléa Newman, 1989, \$8, HerBooks, PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

A Lesbian Love Advisor — The Sweet and Savory Arts of Lesbian Courtship includes a full spectrum of serious and thoughtful advice by Celeste West, 1989, \$9.95, Cleis Press, PO Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

Eye of a Hurricane, thirteen stories in which women ride out their own storms, by Ruthann Robson, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Humid Pitch, a third book of Black narrative poetry from Cheryl Clarke, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

The Other Sappho, a novel about Sappho's contemporary, Lykaina, by Ellen Frye, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

Sans Soucie, short stories about Black women in Trinidad and Toronto, by Dionne Brand, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

Liquid Lovers, paintings by Sandra J. Taylor and poems by Esthere K. Heggie, 1989, \$8.95, Shu Publishing, PO Box 779, West Side Station, Worcester, MA 01602.

Between Us (1989) and *Mountain Singing* (1986), two books of poems by Sharon Davenport, \$5 ea., Eggs Press, Berkeley, CA.

After the Fire, a novel of loss and new beginnings on a Canadian Island, the 12th book from Jane Rule, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Sue Slate: Private Eye, in which a kitty sleuth enters the dyke detective genre, by Lee Lynch, 1989, \$8.95, Naiad Press.

There's Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You — 26 stories in which lesbian and gay parents come out to their children, edited by Lorelee MacPike, 1989, \$9.95, Naiad Press.

Rose Penski, a novel about a loving lesbian relationship and dealing with fear, by Roz Perry, 1989, \$8.95, Naiad Press.

Lifting Belly, Gertrude Stein's great erotic experiment finally republished with an introduction by editor Rebecca Mark, 1989 (orig. pub. in 1953), \$8.95, Naiad Press.

The Beverly Malibu, third in the Kate Delafield mysteries series by Katherine V. Forrest, 1989, \$16.95 (cloth only), Naiad Press.

Voyages Out 1 — a showcase short story collection by two lesbians, Paula Martinac and Carla Tomaso, 1989, \$8.95, The Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave. #410, Seattle, WA 98121-9952.

Good Vibrations — The Complete Guide to Vibrators is exactly what it says, by Joani Blank, updated 3rd Edition, 1989, \$5.50, Down There Press, PO Box 2086, Burlingame, CA 94011-2086.

Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers — essays by Afro-American feminist scholar Barbara Christian, 1985, \$16.95, Athene Series, Pergamon Press, Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, NY 10523.

Women, Power and Policy: Toward the year 2000, Second Edition, essays edited by Ellen Boneparth and Emily Stoper, 1988, \$17.50, Athene Series, Pergamon Press.

Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse, essays on poetry and womyn poets by Mark K. Deshazer, 1986, \$13.95, Athene Series, Pergamon Press.

Radical Voices: A Decade of Feminist Resistance from Women's Studies International Forum edited by Renate D. Klein and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, 1989, \$14.50, Athene Series, Pergamon Press.

Taking Our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality, essays and poetry edited by Frieda Johles Forman with Caoran Sowton, 1989, \$14.95, Athene Series, Pergamon Press.

Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology, the 1982 classic revised, expanded and updated, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck, 1989 (3rd ed.), \$12.95, Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108.

Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish, a new anthology proposing an integration of these realities, edited by Christie Balka and Andy Rose, 1989, \$24.95 (cloth), Beacon Press.

A Noise from the Woodshed, a collection of lyrical, vivid stories from the Irish lesbian poet Mary Dorcey, 1989, £4.95, Onlywomen Press, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP, England.

Passion is Everywhere Appropriate, lesbian feminist poetry by Caroline Griffin, 1989, £3.95, Onlywomen Press.

Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America, starting with the Native American women and ending in the '80s, by Sara M. Evans, 1989, \$24.95 (cloth), Macmillan Publishing Co., Front and Brown Streets, Riverside, NJ 08075.

Significant Differences — Feminism in Psychology, analysis of the interconnections and differences between feminist theory and tradi-

tional psychology by British author Corinne Squire, 1989, \$12.95, Routledge, 29 W. 35th St., NYC, NY 10001.

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, a critique of the notion of fixed gender, by Judith Butler, 1990, \$12.95, Routledge.

Heather Has Two Mommies, a large-format children's book, by Lesléa Newman, illus. by Diana Souza, 1989, \$6.95, In Other Words Publishing, 351 Pleasant Street, Suite 233, Northampton, MA 01060.

Menopause — a self-care manual, orig. pub. in 1980, now revised with resources, by Judy Costlow, María Cristina López, Mara Taub, 1989, \$5, Santa Fe Health Education Project, PO Box 577, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504.

Dark Horse, a novel with an out lesbian running for mayor in a New England city by Frances Lucas, 1989, \$8.95, New Victoria Publishers, Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

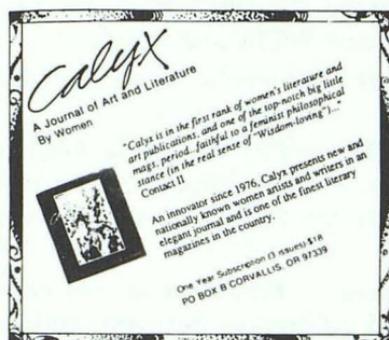
Cut Ups and Cut Outs, an over-size dyke volume of puzzles, astrology, paper dolls and party games by Elizabeth Dean, Linda Wells, Andrea Curran, 1989, \$8.95, New Victoria.

Kicking the Habit: A Lesbian Nun Story, an autobiographical novel by Jeanne Córdova, 1990, \$9.95, Multiple Dimensions, 1604 Vista del Mar Avenue, Hollywood, CA 90028.

Wise Woman Herbal: Healing Wise, an examination of healing traditions and deep specifics on a handful of herbs, by Susun Weed, 1989, \$11.95, Ash Tree Publishing, PO Box 64, Woodstock, NY 12498.

Enter Password: Recovery — new writing on identity, transformation, abuse, friendship, dyke life, motherhood, Radical Jews by Elly Bulkin, 1990, \$7.95, Turtle Books, PO Box 9141, Albany, NY 12209-0141.

The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory by Carol J. Adams. 1990, \$22.95 (hardcover), Crossroad/Continuum, 370 Lexington Ave., NYC, NY 10017.



Koré Archer is a 44-year-old white lesbian feminist who grew up on Cape Cod, Massachusetts and now lives in Santa Cruz, California. She is a bicycle commuter, a civil servant, an earthquake survivor and an unabashed lover of chocolate.

birdelle (b.a. byrd): i am jewish. w/o privileges. i live a life of constant juggling — my art reflects this act. often i do not explain my art, nor myself. interpret as you like for you will anyhow. // now though i want to say/ scream that i am looking at what being “in love” means — really means. with myself, my lover, my children and my family of birth. questions of trust.

Elizabeth Clare: I am a white, middle class, disabled dyke who has lived in innumerable places since leaving Port Orford, Oregon when I was 17. I currently find myself living in Ann Arbor where I write poetry and essays, take long walks whenever possible, and organize against violence against women. I may be moving on soon to go to graduate school.

Anne Corey is a 42-year-old poet, playwright and teacher living in Park Slope, Brooklyn with her lover and four cats. Her work has appeared in *We're Working on It*, *Love Bytes*, *Bubbe Meisehs* and *Sinister Wisdom*.

Susan Dambroff is a poet, performer and teacher of autistic children living in S.F. Her book of poems, *Memory in Bone*, was published in 1984 by Black Oyster Press. Other poems have appeared in the anthologies *Ghosts of the Holocaust* and *Of Shadows Emerging: An Anthology of Bay Area Women Poets*. Her one-woman show, *Wind, Shoes and a Paper House* was produced in S.F. in 1989.

Terri de la Peña is a Chicana fiction writer. A fifth-generation Californian, she has been published in the anthologies *Finding Courage: Stories by Women*, *Intricate Passions*, and *The One You Call Sister*.

Pen Engelbrecht: 29, white, financially stagnant, homegrown (IL native): lives w/ 3 cats in Chicago, loves Barb and Coca-Cola, hates hypocrites, plays b-ball w/ the boys, and scares her comp students. She is being pursued by a PhD in medieval English, worries at lesbian/feminist theory, and occasionally writes something publishable.

Pamela Gray is a 34-year-old Jewish lesbian poet and playwright living in Oakland. She is the co-author of the play "Healin' Dirt Diner," which was produced at Theatre Rhino in San Francisco. Her work appears in several anthologies, including *Bubbe Meisehs by Shayneh Maidelehs*, *Naming the Waves: Contemporary Lesbian Poetry* and *Politics of the Heart*.

Lisa Kahaleole Chang Hall is an over-educated alienated island girl who is finding her ohana in the most unlikely women and men.

Jan Hardy: I'm 33, white, Lesbian Separatist, poet, author of *out here flying*, currently editing *Wanting Women: An Anthology of Lesbian Love Poems*. I'd rather be a tap dancer than a writer, but I like my life.

Terry Hauptman is a painter/poet, currently living in Minnesota. Joy Harjo says of her work, "burns, seethes, gives birth in heat/heart ... to create a city of flames." Recent publications include *Ikon*, *Sing Heavenly Muse*, *Hurricane Alice*, *Caliban*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Crosscurrents*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Heresies*.

Loretta Johnson is in prison in Ohio. A friend of hers on the outside sent this to us.

Beth Karbe: I've been a lesbian for as long as I can remember and, as a photographer, I make images of lesbians exclusively. My desire is to assist our individual and collective healing by putting to paper our beauty, our strength and our power as lesbians. (I'm also networking with other never-het dykes. My address is: 213 NW 4th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32601.)

Sandra Lambert is a dyke — white, disabled; an ex-feminist bookstore lesbian learning to live on SSDI in Gainesville, FL.

Emily Levy: I often write in amusing ways about serious topics. I learned this skill growing up Jewish. It's effective, but sometimes I fear it hides how deeply I grieve for the wounds of the earth, the elephants, the women, the kids.

Anne Mi Ok Bruining was born in the lunar year of the rat and adopted by a white family in 1966. She's lived in Rhode Island, Virginia, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has recently returned to New Jersey. When not dreaming of moving to San Francisco, she writes poetry, practices sign language and speaks out on adoption and Asian Pacific lesbian issues.

Nina Crow Newington's novel, *Harvest of Ghosts* (which her agent says is not a novel), is in search of a publisher. She is working on a second novel (or whatever) and on a collection of poems (ditto). She lives in rural Massachusetts.

Sudie Rakusin: I'm a lesbian and an artist, six planets in fire, live in the woods with my four dog companions doing some sort of art every chance I get.

Mary Carol Randall lives in Oakland and is interested in honoring heart connections in different kinds of relationships.

Joan Schuman lives in Philadelphia. She is a community educator with Women Organized Against Rape, is active with the national Campaign To End Homophobia, produces radio and writes poetry. In her spare time she thinks. This is her first published poem.

Bettianne Shoney Sien hopes people (that's lesbians) will read her book *Lizards/Los Padres*. She is currently co-editing a new HerBooks anthology called *CATS (and their Dykes)* and the *Lesbian Ethics* issue on class. In her spare time she is depressed about being unemployed.

Susan Stinson's writing has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Word of Mouth* from Crossing Press. She is completing work on a novel, *Chalcedony*. She still gets political stimulus and chocolate kisses from women she went to high school with.

Gila Svirsky: I was born in the States in 1946 and have lived in Israel for the last 23 years. Some of that time I have shared with my two daughters and with my special friend Miri. I am Director in Israel of the New Israel Fund, a progressive organization devoted to advancing civil rights (including women's and gay rights), religious pluralism, and Jewish-Arab coexistence.

Cath Thompson is a survivor of her dysfunctional family. Occasionally, she manages to overcome this legacy long enough to see reality and name it. She is not a poet and is somewhat impressed that SW is publishing her poem.

Mary A. White: I'm originally from Florida. Now living in Arizona, I'm getting an MFA in Creative Writing and working on a collection of short stories.

Announcements and Classified Ads_____

PUBLICATIONS

OUT/INSIDE, A Women's Newsjournal Focusing on Lesbian Prisoners. Barbara Ruth, ed. \$6/yr, \$1.50 sample (+50¢ postage). PO Box 2821, Oakland, CA 94609.

HIKANÉ: THE CAPABLE WOMON — disabled wimmin's newsletter for lesbians and our wimmin friends. Available in print or cassette. \$4 sample, \$14 indiv. subscription, \$24 inst., sliding scale available, free to women in prison. Hikané, PO Box C-9, Hillsdale, NY 12529.

CONNEXIONS — AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S QUARTERLY, individual subscriptions \$15, institutions \$24, Canada and Mexico \$16, other out of US \$26 airmail, \$16 surface. Connexions, 4228 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

CATHOLIC GIRLS — all forms for an anthology reflecting diversity of culture, ethnicity, age on the experience of Catholic girlhood. Submit w/SASE: Patrice Vecchione/Amber Coverdale Sumrall, PO Box 61, Capitola, CA 95010. Deadline: Nov. 1, 1990.

CATS (AND THEIR DYKES) will be an anthology — everything from analysis to love stories, all forms, artwork and photos. HerBooks, PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA. Deadline: May 1, 1990.

LESBIAN LOVE STORIES II — all forms of narrative (no poetry) considered for Crossing Press anthology. Send w/SASE to Irene Zahava, 307 W. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850. Deadline: August 1, 1990.

SEVERED TIES: LESBIANS LOSING FAMILY, LOSING FRIENDS — anthology of losses incurred by coming out. Send submissions or queries to Lynne D'Orsay, PO Box 332, Portsmouth, NH 03801.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE BUTCH/FEMME — all forms and artwork for a lesbian anthology to be published by new gay and lesbian publishing house. Send submissions or queries to Multiple Dimensions, attn: Caryn Goldberg, 1604 Vista Del Mar Ave., Hollywood, CA 90028.

WORKSHOPS

FLIGHT OF THE MIND — 7th annual writing workshop for women in Oregon, July 29 to August 5, 1990, with writers Ursula LeGuin, Valerie Miner, Joy Harjo, Theresa Clark, Judith Barrington. Some scholarships. For a brochure, send 25¢ stamp (no envelope) to: Flight of the Mind, 622 SE 29th, Portland, OR 97214.

FEMINIST WOMEN'S WRITING WORKSHOPS, INC. — 15th annual, July 15-27, 1990, in upstate NY. Faculty: Rachel Guido deVries, Judith McDaniel. Speakers: Lucille Clifton, Nancy Bereano. Scholarship deadline April 15th. SASE for brochure to: Mary Gilliland, Director, FWWW Inc., PO Box 6583, Ithaca, NY 14851.

CONFERENCES

NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE, by, for and about lesbians, open to all women, will be April 24 - 28, 1991 in Atlanta, Georgia. Local organizing meetings are happening around the U.S. now, next national meeting will be in Kansas City, MO in late April. For more info, write: PO Box 3057, Albany, NY 12203.

IV INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST BOOKFAIR, Barcelona, Spain, June 19-23, 1990. Exhibits, workshops, discussions in Catalan, Spanish, English and French. For information, write IV International Feminist Bookfair, Valencia, 302/08009 Barcelona, Spain.

FEMINIST EDUCATION: CALLING THE QUESTION — 1990 National Women's Studies Association Conference, June 20-24, at the University of Akron, Ohio. Registration and inquiries to: NWSA National Office, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-1325. NWSA also has several literary awards and scholarships/fellowships available. Write them for more information.

WOMEN'S WORLDS: REALITIES AND CHOICES — 4th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women at Hunter College in NYC. For registration and inquiries, write: Box 733 HN, Hunter College, 695 Park Ave., NYC, NY 10021.

5th NATIONAL CATHOLIC LESBIAN CONFERENCE — May 25-28, 1990, in Estes Park, Colorado. For more information, write: Conf. Coordinator, CCL, Inc., PO Box 436, Planetarium Station, NY, NY 10024.

VIDEO

COUNSELLING THE SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVOR — a series of three videos on childhood sexual abuse with a feminist focus. Available in VHS or Beta, \$150 + tax. For rental or more info., write: The Montreal New Film Group, 3603 boul. St.-Laurent, Montreal H2X 2V5.

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Thank you for listening and for any help you can offer. Please write soon. Blessed Be. Your little Lesbian Sister,

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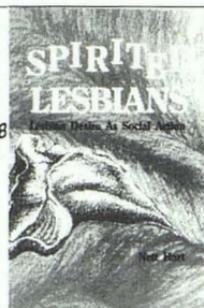
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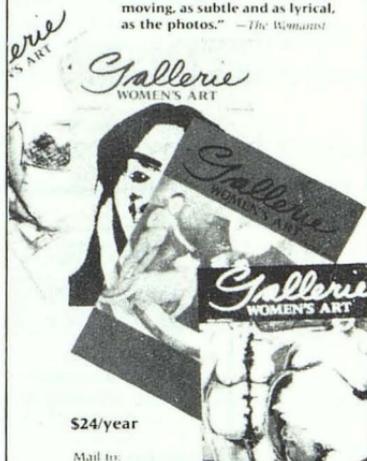
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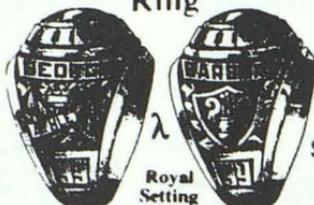
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